

EQUITY FOR FILIPINO VETERANS

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

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EQUITY FOR FILIPINO VETERANS

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2007

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,
*Washington, DC.***

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in Room 334, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Bob Filner [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Filner, Michaud, Hare, McNerney, Walz, Berkley, Rodriguez, Stearns, Lamborn, Moran, Boozman, Brown-Waite.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN FILNER

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs will be in order. We have a full morning ahead of us. I thank everybody for being here. Good morning to all of you. I am very happy to be able to hold this hearing.

Many of you know that since I was first elected to Congress 14 years ago I have been involved in this issue. And, in fact, this year marks the tenth anniversary of a protest that took place with some of the people in this room in front of the White House demanding equitable treatment in which a bunch of us were arrested. But we were able to give a lot of publicity to the issue and, in fact, made some gains.

I am hoping that with the change of leadership in the Congress, we can get past these demonstrations and protest marches and get on to the legislative path to correct an injustice inflicted on Filipino veterans more than 60 years ago.

As most of you know, Filipino servicemembers played a critical role in the United States victory in the Pacific during World War II. These brave Filipino soldiers, drafted into our Armed Forces by President Franklin Roosevelt, exhibited great courage in the epic battles of Bataan and Corregidor.

In addition, these soldiers, while putting themselves and their families at great risk, participated in many guerrilla actions in the Philippines which prevented enemy forces from leaving and prosecuting the war in other areas.

The schedule of the Japanese was held up many, many months because of the heroic action of the Filipino guerrillas.

But despite these gallant efforts during the war, Congress in 1946 broke a promise and denied these veterans their benefits with the passage of the so-called "Rescission Acts." Particularly unfortunate was the language that said that service in the Philippine

forces was not to be considered active military service for the purpose of veterans' benefits.

This language took away not only rightfully-earned benefits, but also the honor and respect due these veterans who served under the direct command of General Douglas MacArthur. The "Rescission Acts" shocked the thousands of Filipinos who fought side by side with Americans and suffered brutality during the Bataan Death March and as prisoners of war.

When President Truman signed the "Rescission Acts," which included various other appropriations matters, he stated that a great injustice was being done. I quote President Truman: "Filipino Army veterans are nationals of the United States. They fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions during the recent conflict. Their officers were commissioned by us. Their official organization, the Army of the Philippine Commonwealth, was taken into the Armed Forces of the United States by Executive Order of President Roosevelt. That order has never been revoked or amended. I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino Army veteran."

That is what President Truman said in 1946, and that moral obligation remains with us 60 years later. A wrong has existed that must be righted. I urge everyone here to think of the morality, of the dignity, of the honor of these brave men.

There is scarcely a Filipino family today in either the United States or the Philippines that does not include a World War II veteran or a son or daughter of veterans. Sixty years of injustice burns in the hearts of these veterans. Now in their eighties and nineties, their last wish is the restoration of the honor and dignity that is due them.

It is time that our Nation adequately recognizes their contributions to the successful outcome of World War II, recognize the injustice visited upon them, and act to correct this injustice.

To those who ask if we can afford to redeem this debt, I answer we cannot afford not to. The historical record remains blotted until we recognize these veterans.

There is a precedent, of course, providing veterans' benefits to noncitizen soldiers. Previously in 1976, we provided such benefits to citizens of both Poland and of Czechoslovakia.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of those who served during World War II. In addition, I am interested in learning more about the efforts of organizations and individuals across the country to educate the public about the injustice done.

I would yield to Mr. Stearns, Ranking Member, for an opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Filner appears on p. 37.]

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. CLIFF STEARNS

Mr. STEARNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I am acting as the Ranking Member for my colleague, the actual Ranking Member, Mr. Buyer, of the Committee. Mr. Buyer is absent in order to attend a funeral for our good friend, Congressman Charlie Norwood, but he sends his greetings. And he has asked me to help him out as the Ranking Member, Acting Ranking Member.

So I am delighted to support him and to be here. And I obviously want to welcome all the witnesses this morning and thank them for their testimony.

I also thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing. You have been a strong advocate for many years as I served on the Veterans' Committee and know of your strong feelings on this matter.

But I think this side, we just have a question that we have for you. There is some confusion on our side of the aisle over the type of hearing we are having today. Based on most of the prepared testimony that we have seen and our staff, the witnesses are here to endorse House Resolution 760.

Our side is under the impression that this is not a legislative hearing and that if you choose to bring that bill before the Committee, you obviously do it using the regular order, a legislative hearing followed by obviously a markup. And I just wanted to confirm that that is our understanding and perhaps is yours.

The CHAIRMAN. Would you like to give me an official definition of a legislative hearing versus what we are supposedly doing today?

Mr. STEARNS. Well, a legislative hearing is that perhaps after this, you would suddenly take this bill, not suddenly, but you would take the bill, start marking it up, and it would be not an opportunity to have a normal order of going through the Subcommittees. We are now in a full Committee.

But as you know, lots of times in Congress, they bring bills on the floor without going through the regular order, which is the Subcommittee has a hearing. The Chairman and the Ranking Member on both sides have an opportunity to discuss it. It goes to the full Committee for discussion and we have the process which gives equal opportunity for all to speak on it.

So we are just hoping that that is ultimately what you intend and that what we have here is what we have often is just a hearing to hear witnesses and to gather information so ultimately we can all better understand the issue because, as you know, we have a lot of new Members who perhaps do not understand your long advocacy for this group and cannot respect the amount of hard work you have done and testimony and the bills that you have advocated when you were in the minority.

So I think my question is just a fair one for our side just to clarify.

The CHAIRMAN. If the gentleman would yield.

Mr. STEARNS. Absolutely, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. I thought because of the number of new Members here we would have, in fact, a legislative hearing in front of the full Committee so everybody would have the advantage of that, and I would intend to move to a markup at some point within the next few weeks of this bill at the full Committee.

Mr. STEARNS. Okay. So could I ask you then, Mr. Chairman, would it go through the Subcommittee of jurisdiction first?

The CHAIRMAN. No. We are the Committee of jurisdiction in this case, so we will—

Mr. STEARNS. So we will skip the Subcommittee and—

The CHAIRMAN. We have had many hearings on this over the last decade, so—

Mr. STEARNS. Okay. Well, I think we are just trying to clarify. And I think what you are saying this morning is we are listening to witnesses, but we are not marking up the bill today.

The CHAIRMAN. Exactly.

Mr. STEARNS. Okay. Well, I think you have confirmed what we in this side believe was the case.

And if I can continue, we are here today to discuss the question of equity. Specifically what is the equity for Filipino veterans who fought alongside our veterans to defeat the empire of Japan in World War II and free their country.

In this discussion, myself and other Members were here to listen to all sides of the issue. I understand, and I certainly appreciate the valor and courage of Filipinos in combat 60 years ago.

House Resolution 622 which passed last session recognized and honored those veterans for their defense of Democratic ideals and their important contributions to the outcome of World War II. No doubt about it.

The history of the issue, however, is mixed. There have been claims that Filipino veterans were promised full benefits by General Douglas MacArthur. While there are no records supporting such claim and the General would not have been empowered by the United States law to make such promises, we do, my colleagues, know that Filipino men, many of them in their teens, fought and died for freedom.

For the benefit of all of us in this discussion, at a Veterans' Committee hearing on this issue in 1998, now retired congressional research analyst, Dennis Nook, said, "Filipino soldiers apparently believe that their service was a basis for becoming entitled to whatever benefit might be given to the United States military personnel."

He said further, "In part, this belief could have been based on ill-advised promises made by United States officers. No U.S. official was authorized to make such promises, and no evidence has been uncovered which suggests that such promises were made, whether or not such authority existed to make them."

[The referenced hearing before the full Committee on Veterans' Affairs on July 22, 1998, entitled, "Benefits for Filipino Veterans," Serial 105-44, can be accessed at http://commdocs.house.gov/committees/vets/hvr072298.000/hvr072298_0f.htm. The Committee no longer has printed copies of this hearing, but hard copies may be viewed at any GPO Depository Library. Locations of GPO Depository Libraries are listed at the following web address <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/libraries.html>.]

Now, my colleagues, Dr. Clayton Lorie, a historian with the United States Army Center for Military History, said essentially the same thing in that hearing. So there is something less than full clarity on what the United States intended in those days.

But we do know, as the Chairman just mentioned, that President Harry Truman supported these benefits. We also know that since then, Americans have supported additional benefits in recognition of the valor and contribution of Filipino warriors.

With that, Mr. Buyer, who is the Ranking Member, and my colleagues on this side, we are open, receptive to ideas and discussion that would help identify what is fair, what is equitable for all vet-

erans, those here in the United States, those abroad, and the American taxpayers who ultimately pay for this solution.

So I look forward to today's hearing. I want to thank our witnesses for coming. And I regret that Mr. Buyer, who is down in Georgia, he is at the funeral of our good friend, Congressman Charlie Norwood, but he sends his greetings and solicitations, and he also looks forward to reading the testimony of this hearing.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Congressman Stearns appears on p. 38.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Stearns.

And we will get right to the first panel since they have other obligations. We have here with us Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Mr. Ron Aument. And we have the Charge d'Affaires from the Embassy of the Philippines, Carlos Sorreta, who I think will be joining us shortly.

Thank you for being here. And I guess you will announce it, but I want to thank the Secretary who called me yesterday and said that he was prepared to continue what had been a practice under the previous Secretary of making a \$500,000 grant to the veterans hospital in Manila to help make sure that veterans in the Philippines would have access to higher quality healthcare, and we thank the Secretary for his commitment there.

Please.

**STATEMENTS OF CARLOS D. SORRETA, CHARGE d'AFFAIRES,
EMBASSY OF THE PHILIPPINES; AND RONALD R. AUMENT,
DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR BENEFITS, VETERANS
BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VET-
ERANS AFFAIRS; ACCOMPANIED BY ROBERT WEIBE, DIREC-
TOR OF VETERANS INTEGRATED SERVICE, NETWORK 21**

STATEMENT OF RONALD R. AUMENT

Mr. AUMENT. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to be here today to discuss the benefits that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides to World War II Filipino veterans. I am pleased to be accompanied by Dr. Robert Weibe, Director of Veterans Integrated Service, Network 21.

For purposes of VA benefits and services, members of the Filipino Armed Forces can be recognized as having served in one of four groups, Regular Philippine Scouts, Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts.

Veterans who served in the Regular Philippine Scouts have always qualified for the full range of VA benefits and services as veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

Ms. BERKLEY. Mr. Chairman, could you ask our witness to speak into the mike. Some of our guests are not able to hear him so very clearly.

Mr. AUMENT. Pardon me.

Ms. BERKLEY. I am sorry. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Berkley.

Mr. AUMENT. Congress limited the rates of disability and death compensation to the equivalent of 50 cents on the U.S. dollar and did not authorize eligibility for VA need-based pension, healthcare, or readjustment benefits for veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts.

Legislative history indicates that the benefits were limited to 50 cents on the dollar in recognition of the different standards of living in the United States and the Philippines.

Congress also anticipated that the newly-independent Republic of the Philippines would rightfully assume additional responsibilities for its veterans.

Under legislation enacted over the past 6 years, veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, and New Philippine Scouts who lawfully reside in the United States and are United States citizens or aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residency in the United States now qualify for disability compensation at the full U.S. dollar rate. They also have eligibility for VA healthcare and burial benefits similar to other veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

The survivors of veterans who served in the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, or New Philippine Scouts who reside in the United States and are U.S. citizens or legally-admitted alien residents qualify for dependency and indemnity compensation benefits at the full dollar rate.

If the veteran or survivor does not meet the above residency requirements, VA pays disability compensation, DIC, and burial benefits based on the half-dollar rate.

Service-connected World War II Filipino veterans residing in the United States can obtain hospital and outpatient medical services for any condition on the same basis as veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

The United States also provides assistance to the Philippines in a number of different ways to facilitate the provision of medical care to World War II Filipino veterans. VA has historically provided grants in the form of monetary support or equipment to the Veterans Memorial Medical Center in Manila.

Since 2002, VA has contributed over \$3.5 million to the VMMC and VA provided the funding under its authority to assist the Philippine government in fulfilling its obligations to provide medical care for Filipino veterans who fought with the United States Armed Forces in World War II.

And we are pleased, Mr. Chairman, that the Secretary was able to share with you his decision to continue that grant again this year based upon the Senate's passage of the House approved continuing resolution for 2007.

The Manila Regional Office administers a wide range of benefits and services for veterans, their families, and their survivors residing in the Philippines, including compensation, pension, DIC, education benefits, and vocational rehabilitation and employment services.

The Manila Regional Office has jurisdiction over all cases involving veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts no matter where they reside.

As of January 2007, the Manila Regional Office provides disability compensation, pension, and DIC to approximately 17,000 veterans and survivors. This includes 6,400 veterans who receive disability compensation of which 3,500 are World War II Filipino veterans and the remainder of the United States Armed Forces veterans from all periods of service.

The Manila Regional Office also provides DIC benefits to approximately 6,700 survivors which includes 5,100 survivors of World War II Filipino veterans. Nearly 15,000 of the 17,000 beneficiaries paid by the Manila Regional Office reside in the Philippines.

Our records indicate that about 690 Filipino veterans and 430 survivors of Filipino veterans currently receive benefits at the full dollar rate based upon their residence in the United States.

We are very pleased that Congress has in recent years improved the benefits for those Filipino veterans and survivors facing living expenses comparable to the United States veterans. We believe these improvements were extremely important as they allowed VA to maintain parity in the provision of veterans' benefits among similarly situated Filipino beneficiaries.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony, and I greatly appreciate being here today and look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Aument appears on p. 42.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, sir.

Is there a representative from the Filipino Embassy here that—would you like to introduce yourself and give us your testimony?

I think the Charge d'Affaires has just arrived. If you want to introduce him.

General LORENZANA. The Charge d'Affaires is already here.

The CHAIRMAN. Good timing, sir.

Thank you, General, for your willingness to step in. Mr. Charge d'Affaires.

STATEMENT OF CARLOS D. SORRETA

Mr. SORRETA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And I apologize for my tardiness.

The CHAIRMAN. If you would introduce yourself for the record, please.

Mr. SORRETA. Yes. Good morning, Mr. Chairman and all Members. My name is Carlos Sorreta. I am the Deputy Chief of Mission and Charge d'Affaires. The Ambassador is currently out of town and offers his deep apologies for being unable to attend this very important meeting.

Mr. Chairman, may I proceed?

The CHAIRMAN. Please.

Mr. SORRETA. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Chairman, all Members of the Committee, thank you very much for inviting us to appear before you and to speak on an issue of great importance to my country and to my people.

Mr. Chairman, when the war ended in the Pacific, Filipino soldiers set their weapons aside, buried and laid to rest their fallen comrades, and collected the shattered pieces of their lives. For

them, the end of the war came peace and with peace, they believed they had hope.

Little did they know that although the carnage and destruction of war had ended, they would once more be entering into another battle, one that would rage and drag on for decades.

Mr. Chairman, this new battle would be a fight that would once more call upon the courage, perseverance, and sacrifice that our veterans had unselfishly shown in the bloodied foxholes of Bataan and Corregidor and the steaming jungles of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao, and the death camps of Capas, Fort Santiago, and Muntinlupa.

This would be another tragic battle that would make them stand witness once more and watch as their comrades would fall one by one, not by the bullets of an enemy nor their bayonets, but by their averages of time and the pain of equity.

Today few of these living symbols of the very freedoms and liberties that we now enjoy remain. By month's end, there will be fewer still, but the Gods of war have not totally abandoned them. For in this new battle, they did not stand alone.

There have been many in the Congress of the United States who have stood by our brave soldiers, possessed with a profound sense of history and a great appreciation of the common values that both our countries stand for and share and have fought for.

Many in this and past Congresses have waged their own battle on behalf of our veterans for justice and equity. On behalf of my government and the Filipino people, let me express our deep gratitude to our friends and partners in the U.S. Congress for their continued support for the Filipino World War II veteran.

Mr. Chairman, in this battle, our veterans have also marched on side by side with many Filipino-American organizations and individuals whose resolve and commitment have given all of us renewed strength to forge on.

Many of these groups and individuals are with us here today, and we thank them for their invaluable and tireless work and for their unqualified dedication.

Mr. Chairman, the Philippine government and the Filipino people continue to maintain that Filipino soldiers who served in the United States Army, particularly in the period between July 1941 and October 1945, are veterans under existing U.S. laws and are, therefore, entitled to all benefits that accrued to U.S. veterans.

We, therefore, welcome the filing and urge the passage of House Resolution 760 and its companion bill in the Senate to restore the veterans' benefits that were removed by Public Law 79-301.

Mr. Chairman, we make this call based on assertions that are clearly based on facts and historical record. And I will not dwell on this because it is clearly on the record, but I would just like to attach to my statement a reiteration of the arguments and respectfully request that it be made part of the hearing record.

The CHAIRMAN. It will be made part of the record.

Mr. SORRETA. Mr. Chairman, Filipino World War II veterans were treated unfairly in 1946. At the critical juncture in both our countries' history, they heeded the call of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They left their families. They left their homes for an unsure fait. They fought bravely, valiantly, and with uncommon

courage. They fought against great odds and they fought without the support that they had been promised.

Of the 470,000 Filipino veterans supported by the U.S. Veterans' Administration in 1946, barely 20,000 remain, 13,000 in the Philippines and 7,000 here in the United States. Those who remain, they have very little time left. Many are sick. Many are infirmed.

Mr. Chairman, honorable Members of the Committee, as an official and representative of the Philippine government, I ask on behalf of a nation that has stood by yours in the name of liberty, freedom, and democracy in World War II and the decades of uncertainty after and in facing today's new and grave challenges to please finally allow these brave soldiers to leave the battlefield with their dignity intact, with the honor that they truly deserve, and, finally, with a victory that has alluded them for far too long.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sorreta appears on p. 40.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

And Members may ask this panel questions. I want to recognize Mr. Hare, whose predecessor from his district, Lane Evans, was a strong supporter of this legislation the whole time he was in Congress, and I hope you will pass on, Congressman, our deep gratitude to Congressman Evans.

Mr. HARE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will.

Let me just say that, you know, I am the new kid around, I suppose, but that was the most compelling testimony I have heard in a long time. And I want you to know, and I congratulate the Chairman for this bill, I fully support it. I cannot for the life of me understand why it has taken so many years to do what is basically and fundamentally the right thing to do.

Whether somebody told somebody and did not have the right to tell them that, I do not know. But it seems to me that, you know, a veteran is a veteran and the Filipino veterans have been discriminated against. And it is my hope that this legislation will come out of this Committee quickly and that we will have a vote on it and then we can right a wrong. And we have the opportunity to do that.

So I guess the only question that I have for you is, and perhaps, you know—I do not know if you have the answer, but, you know, you are fighting this battle, and for the Filipino veterans, I am assuming they have a great sense of feeling that somehow they have been let down by this country for what they have been able to do.

Mr. SORRETA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Sir, the Filipino veterans can speak most eloquently for themselves. But if I may have the honor to speak for them, they have shown the same patience over the decades that they have shown when they were facing the enemy, when they were in the jungles with barely anything. It is the same feeling. Low on ammunition, low on support, feeling abandoned, but they did not lose hope, sir, and they fight on.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. HARE. Well, it has never been easy. And let me just close by saying that, as I said before, I commend the Chairman for his strong support of this piece of legislation.

I will do everything I can, Mr. Chairman, to help get this wrong rectified, and we can get this bill passed and signed into law. It is long overdue.

Thank you very much. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Hare.

Mr. Stearns.

Mr. STEARNS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me also echo my colleague's comment about the eloquent speech that you just gave, Mr. Sorreta. My father fought in Iwo Jima, and I am well aware of the sacrifice the Filipinos made. And so I think everybody in this Committee is sympathetic, empathetic.

There are some questions that as sort of the bouncer for the tax-payers, we just have to understand what it is going to cost, and I think some of the fair questions, if you do not mind, we will ask Mr. Aument, you also.

What would this cost based upon your analysis of this bill over, let's say, a ten-year period? What would it cost?

Mr. AUMENT. Congressman, no bill has yet been referred to us.

Mr. STEARNS. I think you have to put your mike on.

Mr. AUMENT. Excuse me.

Mr. STEARNS. That is all right.

Mr. AUMENT. I said the Committee has not yet referred us this bill for the Department and Administration's views, so we have really taken no action to cost this legislation at this time.

I know in previous bills that had been introduced, you know, some time back, I believe the projected cost of legislation that had been introduced in, I believe, the 109th Congress showed a 10-year cost of around \$2.7 billion. But, again, that was less than a formal estimate. And should the Committee refer us this legislation for our views, we will very carefully cost it out. So right now—

The CHAIRMAN. If the gentleman would yield for a second.

Mr. AUMENT. Absolutely, sure.

The CHAIRMAN. Before the markup comes, we will have both a VA and a CBO official scoring. The CBO gave us an initial estimate, but we believe their assumptions were not necessarily sound.

So we are working with them. They came up with an estimate recently about half of what was just mentioned. But, again, the numbers of veterans and their longevity, I think, were assumptions that were not fully, I think—

Mr. STEARNS. Well, I think, Mr. Chairman, regardless of how we all feel, we should know what it is going to cost. You have given an estimate of \$1.2 billion. Our staff shows that CBO shows it would cost just under a billion.

The Chairman has indicated some of the assumptions were wrong, and I think we all have an opportunity to find out what the real cost would be.

I ask the staff to go back and look at historically when the bill was drawn up in fiscal year 2006. The Ranking Member, Lane Evans, suggested an appropriation of \$22 million. That would be used to give each qualifying Filipino veteran about \$200 a month.

Chairman Filner in 2006 supported this plan which estimated that the cost to the U.S. Government would be around \$22.6 million. So that is for 1 year and that was for 2008.

So we have some varying proposals from 2006 fiscal year and we have now estimates as high as \$1.2 billion over the 10 years. And I guess after you see the cost and knowing how all of us have seen these dollars are so important, the question would be, you know, can we afford it. If we cannot, what can we afford.

Maybe the original numbers that Mr. Filner, Chairman Filner has brought to our attention at \$22.6 million is more appropriate to what we should do instead of \$1.2 billion over 10 years.

Then the next question is, what is the Filipino Government doing for its veterans, because if the United States Government gives support to the Filipino veterans and the Filipino Government gives support, how does that play out?

According to our Census Bureau, the average per capita income in the Philippines is about \$1,400. So if we took what we see in this bill—and, Mr. Aument, you can help me out on this—it is our understanding that if this bill was made into law, every Filipino would receive compensation at the full rates and an old-age pension that would make his or her income a minimum of \$10,579.

Is that what your understanding is also, that that would be the average income of a Filipino in the Philippines? The Filipino would have from the United States Government \$10,600, he would make every year living in the Philippines when the average per capita income is around \$1,400? Are my figures correct?

Mr. AUMENT. Well, the pension program, Congressman, typically makes up the difference between whatever is determined to be the poverty level for pension purposes and the income that that veteran already makes. It would bring pension-eligible veterans up to that \$10,500 figure you just mentioned, but it may be paying each individual something less than that—

Mr. STEARNS. No, but—

Mr. AUMENT [continuing]. Than the income that they already—

Mr. STEARNS [continuing]. We could have that maximum.

Mr. AUMENT. Uh-huh.

Mr. STEARNS. And I would just conclude by saying that that would probably be higher than many veterans in the United States are making. Is that a true statement proportionately?

Mr. AUMENT. The purchasing power of that income certainly would favor the Filipino national, yes.

Mr. STEARNS. Okay. Well, my time is expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Stearns.

Ms. Berkley, any comment?

Ms. BERKLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I unfortunately have battling Committee assignments today, so I am leaving. And I appreciate your courtesy.

I have been a cosponsor of this legislation every time it comes up before Congress, and I am appalled that we have not rectified a 61-year wrong.

With the amount of money that the United States Government wastes on a daily basis does not even begin to compensate the Filipino veterans who helped the United States of America win the war, win World War II. And we are all better and safer for their efforts on our behalf.

I would hope that this Committee and the U.S. Congress move with all deliberate speed to rectify this injustice as quickly as we possibly can.

And it would give me great pleasure to be able to introduce to you, Mr. Chairman, somebody from my congressional district who was here, Rosita Lee. She was Vice Chairman of the Association. She came all the way here from Nevada to add her voice. And I have heard what she has to say and I fully support it.

And I yield back my time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ms. Berkley.

Mr. Lamborn, comment or questions?

Mr. LAMBORN. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Thank you.

Mr. WALZ. No.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Moran.

Mr. MORAN. Thank you. I, too, have supported your efforts and I commend you on your leadership on trying to rectify the apparent injustice that has occurred in regard to Filipino veterans.

And I also associate with the remarks of Mr. Stearns in regard to trying to find the appropriate solution to this problem, but it is one that should be resolved much more quickly than we have been able to do.

My only question is of the Charge d'Affaires, Mr. Sorreta. Can you give us an estimate of how many eligible World War II veterans are now still living in the Philippines.

Mr. SORRETA. Mr. Chairman, thank you, sir.

Sir, our estimates are, at the end of the war, there were 470,000. These are the numbers counted by the U.S. Veterans Administration. As of today, there are 20,000 left, sir, 20,000 in the Philippines.

Mr. MORAN. That are living in the Philippines?

Mr. SORRETA. That are living in the Philippines.

Mr. MORAN. And their average age?

Mr. SORRETA. Their average age, they are close to about 70 to 80, sir.

Mr. MORAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Boozman.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, again, I appreciate your hard work over many, many years in trying to rectify the situation that we find ourselves in. And we appreciate all the veterans being here. Certainly your presence here makes a statement in itself.

A question I have, if we were able—again, we have this problem. We have got problems with our atomic veterans. We have all kinds of things that we are going to be trying to work through in the next 2 years and, in fact, in the next several years.

But if we are able to reach a compromise, my understanding is that if we strike a deal with \$200 a month or whatever, that under current law in the Philippines, that the pension that is being given there now would no longer continue by the government. Is that true? So they do not help us with the amount that they are getting

now. But if we increase that by \$200, would they no longer receive their pension under current law?

Mr. SORRETA. Mr. Chair, sir.

Thank you for that question. The funds that the government has dedicated to the veterans form part of a larger group of funds for all retirees in the Philippine government. It forms part of the funds for benefits, retirement, and all these funds that go to Government employees when they retire.

To be fair to all the others, if one group receives more than what has been allocated to them, then those funds that were given to them would go back to the pool. So it could help out others who are also in dire need.

We are talking about retired nurses and Government employees. It is part of a bigger fund. We wish we could have devoted a very specific fund to the veterans, but the resources are just not that much.

What I would just like to add, sir, is that it does not reflect on our desire not to help the veterans if they get this additional funding. They are getting support of medical, burial. All the other support that goes to a veteran would go to them except for the pension portion, which actually is also quite small. That money would not go into it. It would go back to the fund that helps other Government retirees.

I would just like to add, sir, that after the war, the United States would have spent close to \$4 billion. For 6 decades, we have carried the burden for the veteran. I am not going to quibble over where we will not be giving them any more if they are given the equity. But I would just like to reiterate, sir, that we do support their quest for equity.

Thank you, sir.

Mr. BOOZMAN. And I understand that. I guess what we are trying to do in the process of this is figuring out how much better off the veteran would be once we participated. So right now do they get \$50 a month or \$100 a month or—

Mr. SORRETA. Mr. Chairman, it amounts to about \$100.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Okay. So if we passed legislation here giving them \$200 a month, they would lose the \$100?

Mr. SORRETA. Yes, they would lose that \$100, but their net would be \$200, sir, or \$100.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Okay. The other thing, too, is you mentioned—and, again, maybe you all can help me with the history, but after the war, did we not contribute several hundred million dollars to set up a fund to be helpful in this regard?

Mr. SORRETA. Right after the war, sir, the U.S. Government gave an amount of \$200 million. We were very thankful for that. But recovering from the ravages of war, sir, that \$200 million went to very good causes, but did not last too long.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Okay.

Mr. SORRETA. It just did not, sir, compare to, for example, to what was given to Europe or to Japan to recover from the war. I am not going to compare devastations between all these victims of war, but we were thankful. But, sir, it was just not enough. And we are fighting for equity.

Mr. BOOZMAN. The gentleman here, did you have a comment that you wanted to make?

General LORENZANA. I am General Lorenzana. I am the head of the Veterans' Affairs Office at the Philippine Embassy.

Going back to the question of Mr. Boozman about this \$100 being taken away if and when the Filipino war veterans are given a pension from the United States, yes, sir, it is true. It will be taken away from them because of a law that was passed in 1990.

But there is an effort now to amend that law to remove the effect of that, so that even if the Filipino war veterans get the pension from the United States, they will continue receiving \$100 worth of Philippine money.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Boozman.

Mr. Rodriguez, did you want to say anything before we move on?

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Mr. Chairman, first of all, let me congratulate you because I served 8 years on this Committee before I left for a while, and I know that you brought this issue before us not once, not twice, but every time you have had an opportunity. And I know I have listened to the data through the years, and I just feel it is, you know, about time that we do the right thing.

And I just personally want to thank each and every one of you for what you have done not only in terms of defending your own country but also being there for us. And so I want to thank you for that. And hopefully we eventually will do the right thing on this issue.

And just thank you, Mr. Chairman, for bringing forth your tenacity on this issue. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Rodriguez.

We thank your panel for being here. We will get that request to the VA. Our regards to the Ambassador. One of General D. Lorenzana's predecessors, General Nanadiego, who we wish would be here, called me yesterday and said he was ill and also had to take care of his wife. And if you also would give him my regards.

Thank you very much.

We have a panel of Members of Congress who are here with us today. If they will join us, and then we will hear from them before we hear from some veterans from World War II.

Mr. Honda, you have been a tenacious supporter of this legislation and as Chair of the Asian Pacific Americans in the Congress, we thank you for being here. And you may proceed with your testimony.

STATEMENTS OF HON. MICHAEL M. HONDA, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA; HON. MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE U.S. TERRITORY OF GUAM; AND HON. MAZIE K. HIRONO, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF HAWAII

STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL M. HONDA

Mr. HONDA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Ranking Member Buyer, Chairman Filner, we really appreciate you holding this critically important hearing concerning the injustices done to some of the bravest men to have fought on behalf of the United States, the Filipino World War II veterans.

Mr. Chairman, I also commend you for your tireless leadership on efforts to rectify the situation and for reintroducing House Resolution 760, the “Filipino Veterans Equity Act.”

As Members of the Committee know, I have been a vocal advocate for the equitable treatment of Filipino World War II veterans. I consider the revision of U.S. military status from approximately 250,000 Filipino World War II veterans who fought under the U.S. command and our flag as one of the greatest injustices ever perpetrated by this Congress.

After six decades of our disgrace, we have the responsibility—and this is not a partisan issue—we have a responsibility to correct this injustice and honor their service and sacrifice, and our window of opportunity to make these brave veterans whole is rapidly closing.

In 1934, when the Philippine Islands were a U.S. territory, Congress enacted Public Law 73–127 requiring the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines to respond to the call of the U.S. President.

On July 26, 1941, with the Nation facing the threat of Japanese aggression in the Pacific, that call to arms came when President Franklin Roosevelt signed a military order for the Commonwealth Army to serve with the U.S. Army Forces—Far East (USAFFE) under the command of the U.S. military leaders. These Filipino soldiers bravely fought alongside their American brothers in arms until the end of World War II.

With the enactment of Public Law 79–190 in 1945, Congress recruited an additional 50,000 Filipino soldiers, known as the New Philippine Scouts, in anticipation of needing occupation forces for captured enemy territories. At the time of recruitment, the U.S. Government promised that all that responded to the call would be treated as U.S. veterans for the purposes of their benefits.

As a sidebar, I want us to remember part of the history of our U.S. Army when MacArthur had to leave under orders that the Filipino veterans were still there with our prisoners of war under the Japanese Imperial Army.

We all remember the Bataan Death March. These Filipinos stayed by their side, harassed the Imperial Army in order to make sure that the maximum number of our POWs survived the Bataan Death March. Through the loss of their limbs and through the loss of their lives, they had dared to help the POWs to survive that Bataan Death March.

In 1946, just after the conclusion of the war, Congress rescinded this promise, turning their backs only on the brave Filipino veterans. I say only. When passing the first and second “Supplemental Surplus Appropriation Rescission Acts,” commonly referred to as the “Rescission Acts,” Congress sought to reduce the amount of previously appropriated funds devoted to the war effort.

Within these bills, however, contained the specific provisions that declared that service by the members of the Commonwealth Army and the New Philippine Scouts should not be deemed to have been service in the United States military, effectively stripping the Filipino soldiers of their U.S. veteran status.

You might want to ask yourself, if you had read the “Rescission Act,” that it was precisely written to only affect and impact one group of veterans. And you must ask yourself how many other non-U.S. veterans that fought under our flag with us who were not U.S. citizens but were granted U.S. veterans benefits? How many of those non-U.S. veterans had fought under the U.S. flag and how much did they receive and how many countries did they represent while they fought on our behalf?

Although President Harry Truman signed the “Rescission Acts” into law, he recognized the heroic contributions of the Filipino soldiers and requested that efforts be made to correct the injustice. And I quote, “The passage and approval of this legislation do not release the United States from its moral obligation to provide for the heroic Philippine veterans who sacrificed so much for the common cause during the war.”

Since 1946, piecemeal benefits have been hard won by the Filipino World War II veterans. However, full veteran benefits are still denied. To correct the injustice, I have been a steadfast supporter of the “Filipino Veterans Equity Act,” which would provide the full benefits promised to all Filipino veterans who fought under the U.S. Command during World War II.

I am encouraged by the Chairman’s dedication to facilitate a quick passage of this legislation and the large number of Members participating in this hearing.

As Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC), I can also voice the Caucus’s united support on this concern. We have prioritized the plight of the Filipino World War II veterans as a top legislative goal. CAPAC will continue to work to educate and recruit support from our colleagues and the public.

Other Members may cite the cost of the “Filipino Veterans Equity Act” as an obstacle, but who among us can refute the injustice that has been done? Congress must return the promised veteran status to the courageous World War II Filipino soldiers.

During the war, there were nearly 250,000 Filipino soldiers who had served under the U.S. Command. At this point, only an estimated 22,000 are still living.

To put things in perspective, the funding necessary to provide these remaining Filipino veterans with full equity of benefits is roughly equal to what we are currently spending in 1 or 2 days in Iraq. Must we wait for more of these deserved Filipinos to pass away to justify the cost? Is this how we should repay our courageous veterans? I think not.

Mr. Chairman, these World War II heroes are in the twilight of their lives, and time is running out for Congress to recognize their service. A promise made should be a promise kept, especially when it comes to veterans.

Bolstered by our country’s sense of moral values and honor, we say that our word is our bond. If we are to be a legislative body dedicated to the ideals of justice and dignity, then it is imperative we honor the promise made to our Filipino veterans and restore their benefits.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to close with a roll call of Filipino veterans of World War II from my home in northern California, Bay area that passed away last Congress.

I call this a roll call: Boayes, Guillermo, he died at the age of 87; Carino, Demetrio died at age 91; Duenos, Magdaleno died age 91; Fabricante, Salomon died age 81; Galang, Dioniso died age 81; Gomez, Godofredo died age 83; Pelaez, Ariston died age 75. There were many more before this congressional session. There are very few left.

We talk about the cost of this. What is the cost of our honor? What is the cost of their dignity? And the cost diminishes every year as each one of these veterans pass away.

So it is my hope and desire that the Congress of WWII is still the Congress of this country of 2007. We are an esteemed body. We are the same institution with the same promises that need to be kept.

Congress must not wait any longer to correct the dishonor that our disgraceful actions has imposed upon our Filipino veterans of World War II. We can do no less than keep our word.

I appreciate the time.

[The prepared statement of Congressman Honda appears on p. 46.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Honda.

The distinguished delegate from Guam, Ms. Bordallo, please.

STATEMENT OF HON. MADELEINE Z. BORDALLO

Ms. BORDALLO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the invitation to appear before this Committee today.

I represent the U.S. territory of Guam, closest neighbor to the Philippines, in the U.S. Congress. Forty percent of our population in Guam is made up of Filipinos, including a number of the Philippine Scouts who reside there today, and many have died in recent years.

I have submitted my full statement for the record, but wish to offer a few words of support, Mr. Chairman, and encouragement for our Filipino veterans.

At the very heart of this hearing today and central to the issue before us is the question of equity. The national effort to fully restore the rights, privileges, and benefits of veteran status to surviving World War II veterans of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, to all of the Philippine Scouts, and to those individuals from the Philippines who served in the United States Armed Forces organized resistant units is an effort in the name of justice.

These soldiers, as we have been so reminded this morning, served shoulder to shoulder with American servicemen under the command of General Douglas MacArthur who resisted the Imperial Japanese forces in their homeland in the greatest conflict of the 20th century.

They were seen and treated as equals in the line of duty and in the battle to secure freedom and democracy against the perils of the second World War. There was no inequity on the frontlines of the war, no distinction between the sacrifices of our soldiers both Filipino and American alike, and no differences in their calls to duty as servicemembers under the United States Armed Forces.

Yet, we have an existing and lingering inequity in our government's treatment of our World War II veterans today. This is the inequity which compels us as Members of Congress to come here

today to testify on behalf of bringing justice to our Filipino veterans.

The values, Mr. Chairman, of freedom, Democratic governance, and the rule of law were cherished and sought by the people of the Philippines in the early part of the 20th century. The extent to which these values were inherent in the character of the people of the Philippines was evidenced by the service and sacrifices of the approximately 250,000 of their countrymen that upon order of our President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, were inducted into the United States Armed Forces.

The campaign to liberate the Philippines reportedly included some of the bloodiest fighting of the second World War. We all know the heroic stories of the intense fighting at Bataan and Corregidor. The capture of soldiers by the Imperial Japanese forces during these battles knew no bounds. Filipino and American soldiers were captured together and sacrificed together in the cause of freedom.

The United States Congress, however, withheld benefits from our Filipino veterans with the passage of the "Rescission Acts" of 1946. The continued withholding of these benefits strikes against the very principles of justice and fairness that these soldiers so valiantly fought to defend.

Mr. Chairman, Filipinos are the only national group singled out for denial of full U.S. veteran status while the soldiers of more than 66 other U.S. allied countries who were similarly inducted into the service of the Armed Forces of the United States during World War II were granted full U.S. veteran status. You ask yourself how could this have happened.

Today there are fewer and fewer surviving Filipino veterans of the second World War with each passing year. The need for Congress to honor their service by enacting legislation to fully restore veteran benefits for them is now more important than ever before.

As a Member of the Congressional Asian-Pacific American Caucus under the chairmanship of Mr. Mike Honda, I strongly support and have supported in the past House Resolution 760, the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act" of 2007.

If signed into law, House Resolution 760 would fulfill our country's long overdue commitment to these loyal and honorable veterans. We must act now, Mr. Chairman, to fulfill the United States Government's responsibilities to those who served willingly and ably in the defense of freedom.

Filipino veterans deserve no less than our best commitment to bring them equity and justice in the name of good faith of the United States Government.

I urge this Committee to favorably report your legislation, Mr. Chairman, to the full House as soon as possible. And I thank the Members of the Veterans' Committee who are here today.

I thank especially, Mr. Chairman, the Filipino leaders in this room today that are participating in this hearing who continue all these years, 61 years, to pursue this course in the name of the veterans.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Congresswoman Bordallo appears on p. 44.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

From Hawaii, we have a new Member from Congress, and we welcome her and we welcome her testimony, Congresswoman Mazie Hirono.

STATEMENT OF HON. MAZIE K. HIRONO

Ms. HIRONO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am honored to sit here to testify with my very eloquent colleagues, Mr. Honda and Ms. Bordello.

Thank you very much for the opportunity today to testify on a matter of equity for Filipino veterans of World War II. This is an important issue for me and for the rest of the congressional delegation from Hawaii and for the many families in Hawaii.

Hawaii last year celebrated the 100th anniversary of the first Filipino immigrants to Hawaii. It is long past due for us to pass this legislation and to do the right thing.

As you know, Filipino veterans are those that honorably answered the call of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and served alongside our Armed Forces during World War II. They fought shoulder to shoulder with American servicemen. They sacrificed for the same just cause.

We made a promise to provide full veterans' benefits to those who served with our troops. And while we have made appreciable progress toward fulfilling that promise, we have not yet achieved the full equity that Filipino veterans deserve.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of House Resolution 760, the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act" of 2007, which was introduced by the Chairman to provide the necessary reclassification of the service of Filipino veterans to make them eligible for all the veterans benefits programs administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

In essence, House Resolution 760 makes good on the promise our government made to these brave men over 60 years ago. Today, out of the 250,000 veterans, only about 22,000 remain and of that number, approximately 2,000 reside in my home State of Hawaii.

As Filipino veterans are entering the sunset years of their lives, Congress is running out of time to fulfill our obligations to them.

I would also like to take this time to discuss very briefly an effort that I am jointly working on with Senator Daniel Akaka to provide for the expedited reunification of the families of our Filipino veterans.

Prospective family-based immigration applicants from the Philippines face substantially, often decade-long waits for Visas. It is our aim to introduce a bill that would further the recognition of the service of Filipino veterans by granting their children a special immigration status that would allow them to immigrate to the United States and be unified with their aging parents.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I thank you again for the opportunity to speak today on the need to fulfill our obligations to our Filipino World War II veterans. And I know that our congressional delegation consisting of Representative Neal Abercrombie and Senators Daniel Akaka and Daniel Inouye would lend their strong voices as they have for many years in support of this measure.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Congresswoman Hirono appears on p. 45.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. We thank all of you for taking the time to be here. We will enter into the record the statements of almost a dozen other congressional colleagues who wanted to be heard on this in the record.

Are there any questions from Mr. Hare?

Mr. HARE. Not a question, Mr. Chairman. But I was doing some math as my colleague, Mr. Honda, was testifying. And I hope we can all put this in perspective because I think it drives home what you have worked so hard on.

We are spending \$11 million an hour, as you mentioned, on Iraq. And if my math is correct, if this legislation passed and it cost \$1.1 billion, that would be the equivalent of four and one-half days of what we are spending, number one.

Number two, this is 61 years, not four and one-half days, and 228,000 people who fought alongside our troops to keep them safe and gave their lives for this country. And the question is, from my perspective, Mr. Chairman, is not can we afford to do this. The question is, can we certainly afford not to do this.

So I just again want to go back and say to my colleagues, I am proud to be a cosponsor of this bill. And it just seems to me that regardless of what a person makes living in the Philippines per month, they served, they served admirably, courageously, and for \$200 a month, when you look at what this government throws out the window every single day, were this not so tragic, it would almost be silly to even be talking about the cost of this legislation.

I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Stearns, any comments?

Mr. STEARNS. No, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the testimony.

The CHAIRMAN. Okay. Mr. McNerney.

Mr. MCNERNEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to thank this panel for their heartfelt testimony and the previous speaker as well.

I reflect the pride that I feel many in our district, and there is a strong Filipino community in the City of Stockton, share for the service that the Filipinos did and gave of their lives in World War II. And we all feel eternal gratitude for their service.

I see many Filipino veterans in the audience, and I personally thank you for the service that you gave to the United States and to the Philippines during this period.

My father served in the Philippine Islands in World War II, and he often spoke of the valor and the industry of the people that he worked with. It was a matter of pride. He brought back many mementoes that he showed us throughout the years of his life that I looked on with pleasure and with pride.

And I want to say that I feel there is an urgent need to undo an injustice and to move forward with this legislation. And so I stand up in strong support, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Mr. Boozman.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you all for coming to testify. I enjoyed your testimony.

And first of all, I want to go on record as saying that, I feel at this point, Mr. Filner, we will come up with something that I very definitely will support as far as legislation.

But we have had a lot of different numbers bandied around. In the bill, it talks about \$10,000. Mr. Hare mentioned \$200 which would really only mean \$100 to the individual because they are going to take away their pension. So we have got some things we have got to get sorted out.

What I do not want is for us to put a bill out, though, that has no chance of going anywhere. As you all know, the budget constraints that we have got now going are, a billion dollars is going to be tough to find.

In a little bit, I am going to go over and visit—we are going to have a press conference with the GI Bill. Myself and several others are trying to push the inequity in the GI Bill for the Reservists.

The comments being made about Iraq, this has been going on for 4 years. The question is, why hadn't we done this 56 years prior to that.

So, the problem has been that Congress has just not seen this as a priority. And, I do not know that without Iraq, they would have seen it as a priority as they did for the previous 56 years.

So, again, I appreciate your testimony. I agree with you. What I want, I know is what you all want, is something that we can get before the Budget Committee, get before the appropriators, well, the Budget Committee.

In reality, we are talking about mandatory spending and to get something passed that will make a difference for the individuals that have survived and did such a tremendous job in service to our country many years ago.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Boozman.

And, Mr. Honda.

Mr. HONDA. If I may.

The CHAIRMAN. Please.

Mr. HONDA. I have a possible model of cost that I would like to submit to the Chair for his perusal and share with the Members of the Committee. That was put together by Colonel Romeo Monteyro. You probably know him. And I think that it bears some study as to the possible model that you may want to look at.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Mr. Boozman, the figures will be clarified before the markup. We will need to have those. And the billion, by the way, that is referred is over 10 years. It is not a 1-year cost. So we will have all those figures and try to have some recommendations on how we can meet those needs because I agree with you. There is no sense doing something that is not going to be passed.

So thank you again for your concern.

Mr. Rodriguez?

Mr. RODRIGUEZ. Once again, Mr. Chairman, I want to personally thank you for bringing forth this piece of legislation, and I know you have worked really hard on that.

And I would just also want to thank each one of the presenters, and I know that somehow we always argue about and discuss whether there are resources or not. Six years ago, we had the largest surplus in recorded history and we did not do anything.

And so I think it just a matter of doing the right thing and moving forward. When the priority is there, we find the money to do that. And we just seem not to be able to, even for some of our American veterans, to be able to provide some of the needs that they have.

And I am still thinking of our National Guard that were brought back from Iraq and we had to provide resources for them to be able to fly home, which is ridiculous, you know. And so I think we have just got to do the right thing and indicate that it is an important priority that we have to uphold.

You have been there for us when we needed you. We need to be there for you. And I know it is a little bit late, but, you know, we need to do the right thing and move forward and know the resources are never going to be there. We have just got to prioritize and move forward.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Thank you, our colleagues. Mr. Honda, your honor roll was particularly compelling, and we will continually think of those brave men.

If panel three will come forward. I hope any Members can stay. We have some living history coming before us. And Colonel Edwin Ramsey, who is a legendary figure in the Pacific, and we thank him for being here, joined by Colonel Romeo Monteyro, who is with the Filipino World War II Veterans Federation.

And, Colonel, thank you for your constant support and pressure on this.

Colonel Ramsey, you have the floor.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Chairman, can I just make a comment—

The CHAIRMAN. Yes.

Mr. BOOZMAN [continuing]. With your permission? Again, I apologize. We have a lot of Members missing today. Charlie Norwood, the gentleman that was a Member of Congress from Georgia, passed away earlier this week and his funeral is going on this afternoon. And many Members, they are taking a congressional plane to that funeral. So we have many Members that are attending the funeral. So I just wanted to make the audience aware of that.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mr. Boozman.

Colonel.

**STATEMENTS OF LT. COL. EDWIN PRICE RAMSEY, AUS (RET.),
LOS ANGELES, CA; AND COL. ROMEO M. MONTEYRO, PA (RET.),
ADVISOR, FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS FEDERATION
OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY, VISTA, CA**

STATEMENT OF LT. COL. EDWIN PRICE RAMSEY

Colonel RAMSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the Committee.

I would first like to say, the previous speakers, I would like to say amen because they have already stolen much of what I was going to say.

My name is Edwin Ramsey. I came from Los Angeles to attend this hearing, and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you here today.

Having appeared before the same Committee on November the 5th of 1993, again on July the 2nd of 1998, and since I will turn 90 on May the 9th of this year, I will never have another chance to contribute in some small way to correcting a longstanding gross injustice to the Filipino veterans of World War II.

It is important that you be aware of why I had a unique position during that period of time. In 1941, I was a Lieutenant in the 26th Calvary of Philippine Scouts with whom I fought from the Japanese landing in Lingayen Gulf through the Battle of Bataan.

After Bataan surrendered on April the 9th of 1942, my troop commander, Captain Joseph Barker, II, and myself escaped and made our way to Pampanga Province in central Luzon where we meet Colonel Claude Thorp who General MacArthur had sent out of Bataan to establish resistance behind enemy lines.

We joined Colonel Thorp and began the guerrilla forces in central Luzon designated by Colonel Thorp to be the east-central Luzon guerrilla area under the Luzon guerrilla Army forces of Thorp.

After capture of both Thorp and Barker and their later execution, in early January of 1943, I became the commander of the east-central Luzon guerrilla area or ECLG for short. By the liberation of central Luzon, it had grown to approximately 45,000 guerrilla troops.

With that background, I would like to address the question, the status of Filipino veterans and their treatment, especially in respect to the "Rescission Act" of 1946.

In July of 1941, President Roosevelt authorized through the War Department the formation of the United States Army Forces in the Far East or USAFFE under the command of General Douglas MacArthur. And he ordered the induction of the military forces of the Commonwealth of the Philippines as part of the USAFFE.

It is impossible to see how these Filipino troops could be federalized into the USAFFE and not be part of the United States Army.

Further, when we inducted the Filipinos into the guerrilla forces, we required that they all swear allegiance to the United States of America and the Commonwealth of the Philippines. Therefore, all those guerrillas that were recognized after the liberation would have the same status.

And in that connection, I question why there was a difference in the treatment accorded to the 65,000 or so Commonwealth of Puerto Rico troops and those from Hawaii and elsewhere who served in the U.S. Army and were later treated the same as American veterans.

The USAFFE forces fought courageously, delaying the Japanese time table for several months instead of the 6 weeks that General Homma had been given by the Japanese high command to conquer Bataan.

Also, remember that only the Filipinos remained loyal to their former colonial masters while the Indo-Chinese turned on the

French, the Indonesians on the Dutch, and Malaya and Burma turned on the British. It was just unbelievable loyalty that provided the environment necessary to build the massive guerrilla forces that made it impossible for the Japanese to defend in any serious way against the liberation, the allied forces, and ultimately save thousands of American and allied lives.

General MacArthur personally confirmed this to me in a meeting I had with him in Tokyo in March 1947. And at that time, he gave me an autographed photo signed "To Ramsey with the admiration and affection of his old comrade in arms, Douglas MacArthur." That is my prized memento.

For the sake of brevity, since we have so little time today, for more detail, please refer to the previous testimony that I submitted in the earlier hearings in 1993 and again in 1998, and they were incorporated into the hearing records.

I would especially call your attention to a paragraph on page four of that letter of July the 22nd, 1998, my letter in the hearing, referring to President Roosevelt's message to Congress on October 6th, 1943, calling for our government to provide full rehabilitation of the Philippines at the conclusion of the war.

And I have a copy with me of that letter from General MacArthur forwarding this to us by submarine in the Philippines and the guerrilla forces indicating the recommendation that President Roosevelt had made to Congress at that time.

I thank you, gentlemen, and I would be happy after the meeting is over if you would like to speak to me, I would be available.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Colonel.

Colonel RAMSEY. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Lt. Col. Ramsey appears on p. 47.]
The CHAIRMAN. Colonel Monteyro.

STATEMENT OF COL. ROMEO M. MONTEYRO

Colonel MONTEYRO. I am Colonel Romeo Monteyro, Army, retired, and the advisor to the Filipino War Veterans of San Diego County.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me here today. In the next 5 minutes, allow me to dwell on the particular subject, the loyalty of the Filipinos to America before, during, and beyond World War II.

Private Tomas Claudio, a Filipino, was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces to France. And their footnote in history, he is not known to Americans, but U.S. Army records place him as the first Filipino to die for America. He was a farm worker in California when America entered the first World War. He need not enlist, but he did out of patriotism and love for his adopted country.

Then there was Jose Abad Santos, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Philippine Commonwealth. He became the caretaker of the Commonwealth government after President Manuel Quezon was ordered out by President Roosevelt.

The enemy caught up with him in Lanao and was told to publicly renounce his allegiance to America and pledge loyalty to the Japanese government. When he refused, he was tried by a kangaroo court and was sentenced to die by firing squad.

On the eve of his execution, he told his son do not cry, my son. Show these people that you are brave. Not everyone is given the chance to die for his country. The loyal and brave Chief Justice chose to die for America.

In the movie, the "Great Raid," the loyalty of the Filipinos to America was depicted factually. Filipinos in billions risked their lives by smuggling food, medicine, and money to starving and sick American prisoners of war.

Resistance fighters blocked a stronger Japanese force and prevented it from reinforcing the prison guards at Cabanatuan City, paving the way of the successful rescue of more than 500 American POWs by a battalion of U.S. Army Rangers.

President Harry S. Truman said as he reluctantly signed the "Rescission Act" of 1946, "This does not absolve America of its moral obligation to the Filipino veterans."

President Bill Clinton commented during the award ceremony for World War II Congressional Medal of Honor winners of Japanese and Filipino descents 59 years later, "Rarely has a country been so well-served by a people it has so ill treated. They risked their lives above and beyond the call of duty. And in so doing, they did more than defend America. In the face of painful prejudice, they helped define America at its best."

In Bataan, soldier Lieutenant Henry G. Lee wrote this poem after he watched a haggard group of Filipino Commonwealth Army troops.

Obsolete rifle without a sling and a bolo tied with a piece of string. Coconut hat and canvas shoes and shoddy, dust white, denim blues. These are the men who fought and fled and fought again and left their dead, who fought and died as the white man planned and never quite learn to understand. Poorly officered, underfed, often driven but never led. Lied to and cheated and sent to die for a foreign flag in their native sky.

Lieutenant Lee survived Bataan and even the POW camp, but was ironically killed by American bombs dropped on the ship transporting him to Japan. Owed a moral obligation. Served well though ill-treated, subjected to painful prejudice, lied to and cheated, and sent to die for a foreign flag in their native sky. Yet, they remained steadfastly loyal.

Ladies and gentlemen of this Committee, isn't it high time the Filipino soldiers who fought for America in World War II be invited if only for their loyalty. I know it will probably be a question of money again.

Former Congressman Stump, who headed this Committee during his time in Congress, once asked, and where do you suggest we get the money to pay the Filipino veterans. My answer to that is from the same source that funds the Iraq War.

The Iraqis have not done anything to defend America. In fact, most of them hate us and even as we speak are trying their best to kill American soldiers. On the other hand, the Filipino veterans fought for America and their shabby treatment notwithstanding have remained loyal and ever ready to stand by America.

How loyal were the Filipino soldiers to America? Ask General Ramsey. The living testimony to their loyalty. If he had been in another country in World War II, they would have sent him over to

the enemy or, worse, kill him and collect the prize money on his head. Yet, today, General Ramsey is here with us because the Filipinos remained loyal to the United States.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee. That concludes my testimony today.

[The statement of Col. Monteyro appears on p. 48.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you both for moving and educating us.

Mr. Hare, any questions, comment?

Mr. HARE. Well, I just want to again thank you for your testimony. And let me just again reiterate, and I hate to sound like a broken record, but you are absolutely right. We are spending money as we speak and, yet, we cannot seem to find the money. We will find it. We are going to work very hard to find it. It is not just the right thing to do. It is more than that. It is a moral obligation, I believe. And this Chairman, I think, does not get the credit that he deserves for continuing to push this issue. It would be easy to forget because a lot of people have, but we will not forget. This is a new Congress. This is a new Chair, a new Committee.

And, you know, I will do everything I can, Mr. Chairman, and talk to as many of my colleagues as I can. We have 41 new Members on our side. And when I leave this hearing today, I am going to bring this topic up at our caucus. It is high time that we do something, and I can assure you 61 years, hopefully we will not have to wait 61 more days.

And with that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Again, thank you, Mr. Hare.

Mr. Boozman, anything further?

Mr. BOOZMAN. I really do not have any questions.

I appreciate your testimony. It was very helpful. And I appreciate your service to our country. And I need to visit with you after this is over and you tell me what you have been doing all these years to stay in such good health. And so thank you very much for being here.

Colonel RAMSEY. You are quite welcome.

The CHAIRMAN. We thank both of you. You have both come a long way and both have spent a lot of time over many years fighting for this. You have educated a lot of us. You continue to do so, and we will not let you down. So thank you very much. Thank you, both of you.

Panel four is made up of representatives from various organizations that have been working on this issue, and we welcome you. Many of you also have come a long way, and we thank you.

Lourdes Santos Tancinco is the Co-Chair of the National Network for Veterans Equity and Chair of the San Francisco Veterans Equity Center. Thank you for joining us, Ms. Tancinco, and your testimony is next.

STATEMENTS OF LOURDES SANTOS TANCINCO, ESQ., CO-CHAIR, NATIONAL NETWORK FOR VETERANS EQUITY, AND CHAIR, SAN FRANCISCO VETERANS EQUITY CENTER; FRANCO ARCEBAL, VICE PRESIDENT FOR MEMBERSHIP, AMERICAN COALITION FOR FILIPINO VETERANS, INC.; SUSAN ESPIRITU DILKES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FILIPINO AMERICAN SERVICE GROUP, INC., AND MEMBER, NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR FILIPINO EQUITY; AND ALMA Q. KERNS, NATIONAL CHAIR, NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FILIPINO AMERICAN ASSOCIATIONS

STATEMENT OF LOURDES SANTOS TANCINCO

Ms. TANCINCO. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Committee, my name is Lourdes Santos Tancinco. I speak on behalf of the National Network for Veterans Equity and the San Francisco Veterans Equity Center.

The Veterans Equity Center is one of the pioneer agencies providing services to Filipino World War II veterans. As of today, we have served more than 1,000 veterans in the Bay area.

The National Network for Veterans Equity is a loose coalition of different national and local organizations advocating justice and equity for our Filipino veterans.

Gentlemen of this Committee, as advocates, our mission is a consistent commitment to attain full recognition and restoration of equal benefits to all our veterans.

We face different challenges in pursuit of full equity, but we shall never give up. Time is a critical element for the passage of this bill. It is public knowledge that this greatest generation is diminishing at an accelerated rate. There is a small percentage of surviving veterans still waiting for receipt of their well-deserved benefits.

A decade ago, as an immigration law attorney, I led the establishment of a legal clinic and was afforded an opportunity to meet face to face our veterans. Through the years, we have seen thousands of veterans, have heard their stories, and they always want to see full equity passed into law.

For us and for these veterans, it is a matter of honor and dignity that they be granted recognition for their services and be treated equally as U.S. veterans. Most of those who passed away had a dying wish unfulfilled, questioning why they were treated inequitably. It is very disheartening, but there is still time for the few survivors.

On our part, we are engaging an extensive public education campaign about the bill ensuring that there is an accurate presentation of the peculiar history and relationship between the U.S. and the Philippines during World War II. This campaign resulted in increased awareness and gathered support from various individuals, organizations, state and local governments in support of the equity bill.

One of the major challenges we are forced to face is the issue of cost. The rate that these veterans die is faster than projected. Veterans Equity Center is witnessing a faster rate of dying veterans

than as reported in the 2000 VA study. Hence, if there is indeed a cost, it is a diminishing cost.

The majority of the veterans also residing in the U.S. are SSA recipients. Hence, there will be transfer of budget from SSA from this agency to the VA should the equity bill be passed. If indeed cost is an issue, then answer our two questions. When is the cost of freedom ever free? How can the United States ever have a short memory of the sacrifices of our veterans?

Benefit improvement bills that enhance certain benefits for certain veterans are not responsive to this issue. Creating disparity for those who fought equally and those who risked their lives together is a greater injustice to those who are excluded. We are only for full equity, nothing more, nothing less.

The plight of the Filipino veterans is no longer a Filipino issue of injustice, but an American issue of injustice that has been clamoring for final resolution. For us who believe in the cost of freedom and democracy, for us who believe in fairness to those that fought for us, we are challenged to do what is right and advocate for what our veterans deserve.

We take on the fight for them. Our generation believes in our Democratic idealism and have faith that this country shall not ignore the sacrifices, courage, blood and tears of our veterans. There is no better time to correct this historical error than now. War veterans should be treated right. They deserve no less than equity.

Mr. Magdaleno Duenos, who died at the age of 91, staved then U.S. soldiers from captivity and waited all his life for full recognition which he never received. Instead, he lived a life of poverty in San Francisco, a standard of living not fitting for a war hero, but he never lost hope until his last breath waiting for the equity bill to pass.

Major Demetrio Carino, a World War II veteran, passed at the age of 91. Major Carino demonstrated heroism during the war. He inspired all of us by his undying commitment to seek justice for his colleagues.

During his last years, he was battling no longer with arms, but with his pen writing each and every Member of Congress to support passage of this bill. Like thousands of his colleagues, Major Carino ran out of time. He died fighting for justice.

We thank representatives Mike Honda, Bob Filner, and Speaker Pelosi for their untiring support to this bill, and we strongly urge this Committee to do the same.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Tancinco appears on p. 49]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Next we will hear from a Filipino World War II veteran, Mr. Franco Arcebal, who represents the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans.

STATEMENT OF FRANCO ARCEBAL

Mr. ARCEBAL. Honorable Chairman and Members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, good morning, and Happy Valentine's Day.

Thank you for including me in this panel today. My name is Franco Arcebal, a Filipino World War II veteran, and the Vice

President of Membership of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, Incorporated.

Our nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization has more than 4,000 individual members in the United States. I am now 83 years old and a retired sales executive. I reside in Los Angeles.

Thank you for holding this early hearing on the equity bill, House Resolution 760 for Filipino World War II veterans. Never in the history of our long quest for recognition has this hearing been scheduled within 2 weeks after it was introduced. We owe this to the Honorable Bob Filner, our undaunted and tireless champion.

May we have an applause for him.

[Applause.]

The CHAIRMAN. You are all out of order.

[Laughter.]

Mr. ARCEBAL. With twelve of my comrades for this allegiance, when we chained ourselves in front of the White House in July 1997—that is almost 10 years ago—sadly, we were unable to convince the Clinton Administration to support our bill.

I am honored to present the appeal of my comrades today. Like all of us, we have personal stories to tell about the war, and I want to give you a brief one.

During the second World War, I was a guerrilla intelligence officer. I was caught and severely tortured by the Japanese soldier as a spy. I was sentenced by decapitation. Lucky for me, during the rainstorm at night, I was able to escape and fought again in the liberation of the Philippines against General Lee Amashita for seven continuous months in north Luzon until he surrendered in September 1945.

In 1997, I became a new U.S. permanent resident. At that time, I had a painful dental problem. I sought treatment at the Los Angeles VA clinic. I was terribly shocked when I was told my service in the U.S. Army forces was by law deemed not active service for the purposes of VA benefits.

I concluded that the United States whom I served loyally and risked my life did me injustice. I felt discriminated against. The denial of my benefit was a result of the “Rescission Act” of February 18, 1946, 60 years today this month. This law was enacted over the objection of President Truman. Before this law, Filipino veterans were recognized as American veterans and entitled to all benefits.

And today I expect many credible witnesses to present testimonies in favor of our bill. And I join this Colonel because it is my duty to speak on behalf of my comrades who are now elderly, disabled, and poor.

Over the past decades, our coalition mission was to restore full U.S. Government recognition and win equitable VA benefits. We believe that by passing the “Filipino Equity Act” or the realistic bill of our sponsors, we can finally overcome the discriminatory effects of the “Rescission Act.”

We estimate that about 4,000 Filipino veterans in the United States and about 10,000 in the Philippines may benefit if this bill is approved.

Mr. Chairman, there are three requests I would like to make today from this Committee. First, pass an authorizing language of

the equity bill, House Resolution 760, with a strong bipartisan support from this Committee.

Second, obtain an estimated budget of no less than \$18 million from the Appropriations Committee with the support of President Bush and the support of our VA Secretary Nicholson that would provide an equitable VA benefit monthly in the amount of \$200 per month for us low-income veterans.

Third, and this is very crucial to us, create a task force of representatives of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, representative of the Secretary of the Veterans' Administration, a representative of the Philippine government, Philippine Embassy, and the leaders of key groups.

This task force should determine within 45 days the accurate number of living World War II Filipino veterans in the United States and in the Philippines, assess their economic and health needs, actual needs, and recommend a realistic budget. We must solve this national travesty now.

Let me close by quoting President Truman on February 20, 1946, when he objected to the "Rescission Act." And he said, I quote, "I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino veterans."

Thank you. I will answer some replies if you have some for me.
[The prepared statement of Mr. Arcebal appears on p. 51.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much.

Susan Dilkes from the Filipino-American Service Group.

STATEMENT OF SUSAN ESPIRITU DILKES

Ms. DILKES. Good morning. First of all, I would like to thank Congressman Bob Filner, the Members of the Committee, and Congressman Bob Filner's staff for giving me an opportunity to testify on behalf of the Filipino-American World War II veterans.

My name is Susan Dilkes. I am a daughter of a Filipino World War II veteran, a member of the Steering Committee of the National Alliance of Filipino Veterans Equity, and a founding member of the American Coalition of Filipino Veterans.

I am also the Executive Director of Filipino-American Service Group, FASGI, a community-based social service agency in Los Angeles County, which was started in October of 1981 when a homeless Filipino World War II veteran was found sleeping in the garage of our founding member, Remedios Geaga.

Since then, FASGI has assisted thousands of Filipino-American World War II veterans with temporary shelter, health and mental health issues, food distribution and others. FASGI operates a transitional housing shelter for independent living for more than 400 World War II veterans.

In 1996, with the help of Filipino World War II veteran volunteers, FASGI launched FILVOTE, the Filipino-American Voters Mobilization, and has registered more than 13,000 Filipino-American voters in Los Angeles County.

Last year, 2006, FASGI obtained a grant from the State of California, Department of Community Services and developed a service block grant to outreach Filipino-American veterans who are still alive and living in the Los Angeles area.

The goal of the outreach is to reduce the risk of poor health resulting from inadequate housing and to refer homeless Filipino World War II veterans to our shelter, to our Healthy Active Lifestyle Program, and to assist and to advocate for the Filipino World War II veterans for the benefits that were promised to them by the government of the United States in 1942 by President Delano Roosevelt.

For the past twelve months, FASGI has worked at this outreach program, but has referred only six Filipino-American veterans to our transitional shelter because there are few of them left.

These men are now in their eighties and many are in very poor health. If Congress doesn't act soon, there will be no one left. This is your last chance to correct a wrong which is now more than a half century old. I believe you are men and women of good intention and now it is time for those intentions to be converted into law.

Indeed there are benefits beyond those that are visible on the face of this legislation. First, the passing of House Resolution 760 granting full equity benefits for the Filipino-American World War II veterans provides the United States with an opportunity to rescue its reputation as a fair, honest and reputable country that honors its commitment by helping the remaining 5,000 to 7,000 Filipino-American World War II veterans currently living in the United States. Our country can take a long step toward rescuing its honor.

Second, passing House Resolution 760 improves the foreign relation between the Philippines and the United States. It reduces the political irritation of unfulfilled commitment for 13,000 Filipino-American World War II veterans who are living in the Philippines.

And to the extent payments are made, it will improve the flow of cash to the Philippines, a poor country, in dire needs of foreign support and liquidity.

Earlier someone asked a question how much this bill will cost. It does not occur to me to think about the cost. I have a son who called me and he said to me, "Mom, I am here in Afghanistan." For Mother's Day, he called me and said, "Happy Mother's Day Mom, I love you. I am here in Iraq." And it never occurred to me that you would ask this question, "How much will it cost?" I said, "Son, I am proud of you. Fight for the United States. I love you." I did not ask the cost of the life of my son to defend our country and neither should you.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Dilkes appears on p. 54.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you and we wish your family the best.

Alma Kerns, who is the National Chair of the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations.

STATEMENT OF ALMA KERNS

Ms. KERNS. Good morning. I thank you, Congressman Filner, and all the Members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee for holding this historic hearing on the "Filipino Veterans Act" of 2007.

My name is Alma Kerns from Seattle, Washington, and I am Chair of the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations, better known by its acronym, NAFFAA.

I am deeply honored to speak on behalf of the National Federation of Filipino-American Associations and the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity, which represent many veterans' advocates, service providers, community activists, and national Filipino-American organizations.

Founded ten years ago, NAFFAA aims to empower the nearly three million Filipinos in America to become active participants and leaders in all aspects of U.S. society.

The Filipino population is among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the country today with one of the highest naturalization rates and a 76 percent voter turnout nationwide.

We have significant concentrations of Filipino-Americans in almost every congressional district throughout the nation. I do not exaggerate when I say that there is a Filipino in every town and city in the United States today, each one making a meaningful contribution to the political, cultural, commercial, and social life of this country.

I am here before you today primarily as the daughter of a World War II veteran. My father and four uncles survived the brutalities of the war, the Bataan Death March, the concentration camp, and life-threatening diseases like malaria, typhoid, and dysentery. They have now passed on, but their bravery and their pride as soldiers have not been forgotten by us, their children and grandchildren.

I owe it to them and all their comrades, the valiant Filipinos who risked their lives for the sake of freedom and democracy, to speak before you today and appeal to you, our honorable legislators, to correct a tragic error of omission and give the Filipino veterans the dignity and recognition they deserve.

The second reason I am here today is due to a pledge I made as NAFFAA's National Chair to continue to fight for the passage of the veteran equity bill. It was our rallying cry when more than 2,000 community leaders and veterans gathered in Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1997. It is indeed time for America to honor its promise to our ailing and aging veterans. They only have a few more years to live.

Over the years, NAFFAA has worked closely with Filipino veterans' groups, civil rights organizations, and community advocate groups to press Congress to rectify a grievous error in judgment, a betrayal that was shamefully enacted by the 1946 "Rescission Act." It has been 61 years, but Congress to this day has yet to act and do the right thing.

These are the sentiments of the millions of Filipino-Americans who believe that this is an American justice issue, that this is a matter of honor and dignity not just for Filipinos but for all Americans.

In Seattle where I live, it pains me to see our aging veterans living in substandard conditions, suffering in loneliness, separated from their children and grandchildren, waiting patiently for the equity bill to pass so they can go home.

For example, Benito Valdez, 83 years old, and Julian Nicolas, 85 years old, two of the last three remaining Filipinos who helped in the Great Raid that rescued 600 American and Canadian prisoners of war from the Cabanatuan Garrison Camp, live in my beloved State of Washington. These two gallant warriors, silent in their an-

guish and disappointment, cannot understand why the U.S. Congress is taking so long to fulfill its broken promise.

Together with members of the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity formed solely to secure the passage of the equity bill, I am urging you, our legislators, to search deep into your hearts and conscience and once and for all give justice to our veterans who have remained loyal to this country and whose love for freedom and democracy will never fade.

NAFFAA and its partners in the National Alliance will not give up this fight to restore our veterans' rightful status as American veterans. We want to assure our children and grandchildren that our generation has remained steadfast and strong in our resolve to see that justice is done.

We will never be at peace with ourselves if we do not tell the story of a broken promise. We will do it because we believe that this great country called America is still the fountain of fairness and justice and a beacon of hope for all mankind. The time is here now to show the whole world that this country does not forget the courage and bravery of those who fought for its freedom.

To the esteemed Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, we implore you to act honorably on our message, that the Filipino World War II veterans have been treated unfairly by the United States during the past 61 years.

We also urge the American people to stand with us and support our veterans' cause as this is an issue that cries out for American justice and a matter of honor not just for our generation but for generations to come.

I now appeal to you, our national legislators, to pass the Filipino veterans equity bill without delay. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you all for your very eloquent testimony. I think the comment is right that this is our last chance, and we thank you for making that so clear to us.

Ms. KERNS. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Kerns appears on p. 55.]

The CHAIRMAN. Ms. Brown-Waite, do you have any comments, questions?

Mrs. BROWN-WAITE. No questions. I certainly want to thank the witnesses also. I apologize. I was not here earlier. I have three Committee meetings going on simultaneously.

I have a large number of Filipino-Americans living in my district. Many of them have such a zest for life, people who served in the 1950s in the Korean war all the way down to those who served in the Vietnam War.

I just want to tell you that very often I say to them I want to know what they drink because they nowhere near look their age and they have such a love of life, and they truly are a segment of the military that we could not have done without.

And the pension bill obviously is one that has been around and one that I know Mr. Filner feels very, very passionately about as do many Members of the Committee.

And I thank you all for being here.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

We do have a final panel, representatives from the American Legion and the Vietnam Veterans of America. If they will come forward.

Alec Petkoff, who represents the Veterans Affairs Rehabilitation Commission of the American Legion, thank you for joining us today.

STATEMENTS OF ALEC PETKOFF, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION, AMERICAN LEGION; AND RICHARD F. WEIDMAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR POLICY AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS, VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA

STATEMENT OF ALEC PETKOFF

Mr. PETKOFF. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I would like to submit my written testimony for the record.

The CHAIRMAN. It will be entered. Thanks.

Mr. PETKOFF. And I would certainly like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on rectifying the injustice that Filipino veterans are currently enduring.

The American Legion applauds the Chairman's leadership in addressing this issue by introducing House Resolution 760, the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act" of 2007.

I would like to also recognize those legionnaires who are here today supporting this important legislation.

The American Legion by adoption of a national resolution to support legislation to grant Filipino World War II veterans equal VA benefits supports full recognition and benefits to Filipino veterans who were part of the defense of the Philippine Islands during World War II.

While Filipino veterans have recently been somewhat successful in incrementally increasing benefits to parity with other U.S. veterans, it is time to finally undo the wrong resulting from the enactment of the "Rescission Acts," which legally revoked their status as U.S. veterans and subsequently denied them the benefits they earned through their service.

The passing of House Resolution 760 will finally give these brave veterans, wherever they may live, the full VA benefits they have earned.

With each passing day, the number of these heroes grows smaller. The American Legion urges Congress to quickly pass House Resolution 760 and end the shameful policy that Filipino veterans and their dependents have had to endure for the last 60 years.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to present the American Legion's view on this bill and to be a voice in support of completely rectifying this national shame.

I welcome any questions you might have.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Petkoff appears on p. 56.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for your strong support.

Mr. Weidman from the Vietnam Veterans of America.

STATEMENT OF RICHARD F. WEIDMAN

Mr. WEIDMAN. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity for Vietnam Veterans of America to present our views here today and ask that our written statement be submitted into the record.

As you know, Vietnam veterans know more than a little bit about being treated as second-class citizens when we came home. It is not an accident that the founding principle of Vietnam Veterans of America is never again shall one generation of American veterans abandon another generation of American veterans.

That includes our fathers' generation as well as our sons and daughters and nieces and nephews serving today in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere in the world in the Global War on Terrorism.

So for that reason, Vietnam Veterans of America supports House Resolution 760 and equity. Redress for those who have already passed on will never happen, and it is truly a case of justice delayed is justice denied. But for the complete equity of those who, no matter where they live, to draw the same benefits as any other World War II veteran is something that we are deeply committed to.

And whether that be through the vehicle of House Resolution 760 or another vehicle, we think it is long overdue that the Congress take the steps in order to bring these fine individuals, who fought for America's freedom when we were truly indeed threatened, up to parity with every single other one.

Some people will not say it flat out. We will say it flat out. The "Rescission Act" of 1946 was a racist move on the part of some people in the Congress. And, unfortunately, it prevailed.

As you will recall the history of the GI Bill in 1944, there were some in the House of Representatives who were fighting that bill because they did not want any benefits to go to persons of color. And the key Committee vote prevailed by one vote only thanks to Eddie Rickenbacher, the World War I ace, flying a particular Congressman in that gave them a majority. If you look at the record, it is unanimous, but it was not unanimous.

So that scar, if you will, on our Nation's history having to do with men and women and in this case men and Filipinos who fought bravely alongside American GIs needs to be rectified and rectified now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for allowing Vietnam Veterans of America to offer our views this morning.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Weidman appears on p. 56.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I think your two statements on behalf of justice show that the Filipino-Americans are not alone, that you bring with your organizations and others that support this the comradeship and the support of veterans all across our Nation. And I think it is very significant. The people in the audience who heard your statements are very much moved by that, and we certainly appreciate that.

Ms. Brown-Waite, any—

Mrs. BROWN-WAITE. Just a question for both members of the panel. How would you define pension equity for those World War II veterans still living in the Philippines?

Mr. PETKOFF. As far as the question of pension equity and describing it, the American Legion believes that these veterans are

U.S. veterans and deserve the full benefits that any U.S. veteran should get and does get.

As far as comparing what they would get if they were living in the Philippines or here is not the issue to use. The issue is that they are veterans and should be equally treated as such.

Mr. WEIDMAN. I think the point, Ms. Brown-Waite, if I may suggest it, that you were driving at is the cost of living in the Philippines is so much less than the cost of living in America.

I would point out that the cost of living State to State in America varies dramatically. What it costs to live north of Cordilane is less than half, much less than half of what it costs to live in your district in Florida, ma'am. And so there already is a variance.

I can tell you that I know Vietnam veterans who reside in Belize and Guatemala and Mexico and in Vietnam and other places because it will stretch their compensation and they are able to live a more decent life. We do not recommend that.

But as long as there is not an adjustment in compensation or service-connected or in pension, based on the cost of living where one lives, we think it should be across the board. And equity in this case would mean parity, ma'am.

Mrs. BROWN-WAITE. I would challenge the gentleman to come down to my district and listen to people complain about the very high cost of insurance, property and casualty insurance, and taxes. Unfortunately, Florida is no longer an inexpensive place to live.

The CHAIRMAN. Again, as Mr. Weidman pointed out, there is no difference in cost of living anywhere that we apply, and we do not change things when people move from place to place. So it probably would be more of a waste of money to do that than just go by the book.

We thank all of you who are here today. Many of you have come a long way. I think it is very important that you did come. The record will be clear about what you said and the impact that you have made.

We intend to have a markup of this within several weeks. We will let you all know about that, and we will deal with these issues of cost and equity at that time.

Thank you so much, everybody, for educating us today. This hearing is adjourned.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 12:13 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

Prepared Statement of Hon. Bob Filner Chairman, Full Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Good Morning—*Magandang umaga.* Thank you all for coming. As you already know, I am very happy to be able to hold this hearing today. Ever since first being elected to Congress in 1992, I have been heavily involved in the Filipino veterans' equity issue. In fact, this year marks the 10-year anniversary of my protest, along with Filipino veterans, in front of the White House demanding equitable treatment. I am hoping that with the change of leadership here in Congress, we can get past the demonstrations and protest marches and get on the legislative path to correct the injustice inflicted on Filipino veterans over 60 years ago.

As most know, Filipino service members played a critical role in the United States' victory in the Pacific during World War II. The brave Filipino soldiers, drafted into our Armed Forces by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, exhibited great courage in the epic battles of Bataan and Corregidor. In addition, these soldiers, while putting themselves and their families at risk, participated in many guerilla actions in the Philippines, which prevented enemy forces from leaving and prosecuting the war in other areas. Despite the gallant efforts of Filipino veterans during the war, Congress, in 1946, denied these veterans their benefits with the passage of the Rescission Acts.

Particularly unfortunate was the language of the Rescission Acts which said that service in the Philippine forces was not to be considered *active military service* for the purposes of veterans' benefits. This language took away not only rightfully earned benefits, but also the honor and respect due these veterans who served under the direct command of General Douglas MacArthur. The Rescission Acts shocked the thousands of Filipinos who fought side-by-side with Americans and suffered brutality during the Bataan Death March and as prisoners of war.

When President Harry S. Truman signed the Rescission Acts, which included various other appropriations matters, he stated that a great injustice was being done.

"Filipino Army veterans are nationals of the United States. . . . They fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions during the recent conflict. Their officers were commissioned by us. Their official organization, the Army of the Philippine Commonwealth, was taken into the Armed Forces of the United States by Executive Order of President Roosevelt. That order has never been revoked or amended. I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino Army veteran."

That was President Truman in 1946. That moral obligation remains with us today.

For more than sixty years, a wrong has existed that must be righted. I urge everyone here to think of morality, of dignity, of honor. There is scarcely a Filipino family today, in either the United States or in the Philippines, that does not include a World War II veteran or a son or daughter of a veteran. Sixty years of injustice burns in the hearts of these veterans. Now in their 80s and 90s, their last wish is the restoration of the honor and dignity due them.

It is time that our nation adequately recognizes their contributions to the successful outcome of World War II, recognize the injustice visited upon them, and act to correct this injustice. To those who ask if we can afford to redeem this debt, I answer: "We can't afford not to." The historical record remains blotted until we recognize these veterans.

Also, I would like to point out that providing veterans' benefits to non-citizen soldiers is not without precedent. Previously, in 1976, Congress provided veterans' benefits to citizens of both Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Finally, I look forward to hearing the testimony of those who served during World War II. In addition, I am interested in learning more about the efforts of organizations and individuals across the country to educate the public about the injustice done to Filipino veterans.

Prepared Statement of Hon. Cliff Stearns

Good Morning.

I want to welcome all of the witnesses and thank them for their testimony. I also thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.

We are here today to discuss the question of equity; specifically what is equitable for Filipino veterans who fought alongside our forces to defeat the Empire of Japan in World War II and free their country. In this discussion, I am here to *listen* to all sides of the issue.

I do appreciate and understand the valor and courage of Filipinos in combat sixty years ago. House Resolution 622, which passed last session, recognized and honored these veterans for their defense of democratic ideals and their important contribution to the outcome of World War II.

There have been claims that Filipino veterans were promised full benefits by General Douglas MacArthur. While there are no records supporting such claims, and the general would not have been empowered by U.S. law to make such promises, we do know that Filipino men, many in their teen years, fought and died for freedom.

For the benefit of us all in this discussion, at a Veterans' Committee hearing on this issued in 1998, now-retired Congressional Research Analyst Dennis Snook said, "Many Filipino soldiers apparently believe that their service was a basis for becoming entitled to whatever benefits might be given to U.S. military personnel."

He said further, "In part, this belief could have been based on ill-advised promises made by U.S. officers. No U.S. official was authorized to make such promises, and no evidence has been uncovered which suggests that such promises were made whether or not such authority existed to make them."

Dr. Clayton Laurie, a historian with the U.S. Army's Center for Military History, said essentially the same thing in that hearing.

So there is something less than full clarity on what the U.S. intended in those days. We know that President Truman supported benefits. We also know that since then, Americans have supported additional benefits in recognition of the valor and contributions of Filipino warriors.

With that, I am open to ideas and discussion that would help identify what is equitable—for all veterans, those here in the U.S., those abroad, and the American taxpayers who will pay for our solution.

I look forward to hearing today's testimony.

Again, I want to once again thank our witnesses who have traveled far to testify on this important issue.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

Prepared Statement of Hon. John Boozman

Mr. Chairman, I would note that in the past you have stated that your district has more Filipino veterans than any other district in the nation. So, I understand why this is an important issue to you.

For those of us who do not have a large Filipino population, the issue of equity is less of a political issue than a larger moral one. I am sure that every Member here recognizes the noble service rendered by Filipino veterans to both the United States and their about-to-be independent nation of the Philippines.

I assume that sometime in the near future, you will bring H.R. 760 before the Committee and at that point, all of the Members will be presented with the larger equity issue of where to spend our scarce paygo funds among the myriad of needed program improvements.

I yield back my time.

Prepared Statement of Hon. Doug Lamborn

Good Morning.

Growing up, I read of the brave struggles that occurred in the early weeks of the war in the Pacific. Outnumbered American troops fought side-by-side with Filipino patriots in arms; many of them suffered years of captivity under the most brutal of conditions.

Then and throughout World War II, Filipinos earned our respect and admiration in a heroic effort that helped the allies secure that hemisphere from the darkness of imperialism.

Over the past six decades, beginning with U.S. aid to the newly independent Republic of the Philippines, our nation has demonstrated a steady resolve to treat Filipino veterans with equity.

I am honored to be here today to continue the discussion of equity in the treatment of these brave veterans, and I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panelists.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back my time.

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Steve Buyer
Ranking Republican Member, Full Committee on Veterans' Affairs**

Mr. Chairman as I have written you, I am absent from today's hearing to attend the funeral of Rep. Charlie Norwood. Congressman Norwood was a colleague, veteran friend, and a statesman dedicated to the Americans he served.

I thank the witnesses here today for their testimony, and those who, under arms, served the American and Philippine people in World War II, I especially thank you for your service.

I submit for the record an opinion piece that was published in *The Washington Post* on January 28, 1998. The article, entitled "Filipino Vets and Fairness" was written by the former Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Congressman Bob Stump.

I associate myself with his remarks and I look forward to a continuation in the equity with which we have provided Filipino veterans of World War II with VA healthcare and benefits.

The Washington Post
January 28, 1998
By Bob Stump

Filipino Vets and Fairness

Much has been made recently of the renewed demands by Filipino veterans of World War II for an increase in payments of U.S. veterans' benefits ["Under the American Flag," editorial, Dec. 13]. As a World War II Navy veteran of the Pacific theater and of the liberation of the Philippines, I respect the service rendered by Filipino veterans. But it is important to view current policy in its historical context. While Filipino forces certainly aided the U.S. war effort, in the end they fought for their own, soon-to-be independent Philippine nation. I do not believe that simply serving under U.S. command meets the test of swearing allegiance to the Constitution of the United States.

Fairness is a concept often mentioned when discussing veterans' benefits for Filipinos. Fairness is certainly important. That is why I am disappointed that Filipino veterans look to the United States for increased benefits, since it was Philippine soil on which the U.S. and Philippine armies fought the Japanese. I strongly believe the government of the Philippines bears responsibility for its veterans. Yet the benefits provided by the United States far exceed those provided by the Philippines. I believe that is one measure of fairness. Should U.S. veterans ask for benefits from the Philippines or any other country they liberated in World War II?

News accounts about promises of full U.S. veterans benefits being made to Filipino veterans during World War II appear to be unsubstantiated, despite our best-faith efforts to find such documentation. Using the experts at the Congressional Research Service, our investigations have determined five important points. First, the records of President Franklin Roosevelt, Gen. Douglas MacArthur and the War Department clearly show no intent to offer Filipinos full U.S. benefits. Second, most Filipinos who were under the command of the U.S. Armed Forces were considered members of the Philippine Army. Third, the original Philippine Scouts, who were part of the U.S. Army since 1900, are receiving full benefits. Fourth, at least two court cases have upheld the current benefit program. Finally, Filipinos are the only group of non-U.S. veterans receiving VA service-connected disability compensation and survivors' benefits. No other Allied nation's veterans receive such benefits from the United States. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, in 1997, the United States paid nearly \$50 million worldwide to Filipino veterans and their survivors. Additionally, the VA spent \$3.2 million for contract medical care delivered to Filipino veterans in the Philippines.

Two categories of Filipino veterans currently receive full U.S. benefits, while three categories receive benefits at the one-half rate. Even at the one-half rate, the compensation is generous. A 100 percent disabled Filipino veteran receives \$962 per month—nearly 12 times the Philippine per capita income, while a veteran rated 20 percent disabled receives about \$90 per month—roughly equal to their national per capita income. The Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) payment to survivors of Filipino veterans is \$416 per month, or five times per capita income. I wish we could do that well for our own veterans. If a U.S. DIC recipient were to receive a payment equal to five times U.S. per capita income, it would be nearly \$90,000 per year instead of the roughly \$10,000 they now receive.

We are not ignoring the concerns of the Filipino community and are treating it fairly. In 1997 I had the honor of meeting with several representatives of the Philippine American Heritage Federation, including retired Brig. Gen. Tagumpay Nanadiego of the Philippine Embassy and attorneys Joel Bander and Jon Melegrito. This was the third time I have met with various Filipino veterans in the last several months, including Antonio Ty, commander for the Philippine Department of the American Legion.

It is clear to me, after meeting with Filipino veterans, that many do not understand the benefits for which they are now eligible. I have asked the VA to increase its outreach to the Filipino community in that regard. There also seems to be a misperception among the Filipinos that every American World War II veteran is receiving a VA pension. That is hardly the case. Of the roughly 7 million World War II veterans still living, only about 233,000 (3 percent) are receiving a VA nonservice-connected disability pension. The Filipinos I met were also surprised to learn that I do not receive anything from the VA for my World War II service in the Philippines.

These meetings with the Filipinos do not mark the end of our efforts. I have instructed my staff to work with the Philippine American Heritage Federation to arrive at a common understanding of the U.S. and Philippine benefit programs and their historical context.

The United States continues to be generous to Filipino veterans, and I continue to believe that the basic structure of U.S. programs is appropriate. I believe we have been fair.

The writer, a Republican representative from Arizona, is Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Statement of Carlos D. Sorreta, Charge d'Affaires, Embassy of the Philippines

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Veterans Committee.

Thank you for inviting us to appear before this Committee and for the opportunity to speak on an issue of great importance to my government and to the Filipino people.

When the war in the Pacific ended, Filipino soldiers set their weapons aside, buried their fallen comrades and started to collect the shattered remains of their lives.

For them, with peace, had come hope.

Little did they know that while the carnage and destruction of war had ended, they would be facing a new battle—one that would last for decades.

This would be a fight that would once more call upon the courage, perseverance and sacrifice that they had unselfishly shown in the foxholes of Bataan and Corregidor, in the jungles of Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao, and in the prisons of Capas, Fort Santiago and Muntinlupa.

This would be a battle that would once again force them to witness their comrades fall one by one, not by the bullets or bayonets of an enemy, but by the ravages of time and the pain of inequity.

Today, few of these living symbols of the very freedoms and liberties that we now enjoy, remain. By the end of this month, a few more would have fallen.

But they have not been alone in this battle.

For there have been those in Congress who have stood boldly by our brave soldiers—those whose profound sense of history, and whose deep appreciation for the common values that both our countries share and have fought for, have made them wage their own battles in Congress for justice and equity.

On behalf of my government and the Filipino people, let me express our thanks to the U.S. Congress for its continued support for the Filipino WWII veteran.

In this battle, our veterans have also marched on side-by-side with many Filipino-American groups and individuals whose resolve and commitment have given all of us renewed strength and hope.

Many of these groups and individuals are with us today, and we thank them for their invaluable and tireless work and for their unqualified dedication.

Mr. Chairman, the Philippine Government and the Filipino people continue to maintain that the Filipino soldiers who fought and served under the U.S. Army during WWII, specifically during the period between July 1941–October 1945, are U.S. veterans under then existing U.S. laws and are entitled to all benefits due a U.S. veteran.

We therefore welcome the filing and urge the passage of H.R. 760 and its companion bill in the Senate, S.57 into law, to restore veterans' benefits that were removed by P.L. 79-301.

We make this call based on assertions that are supported by clear facts and historical records. I have attached to this statement a reiteration of our arguments and respectfully request that these be made part of the record.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, the Filipino WWII veterans were treated unfairly by the 79th Congress and the U.S. Government in 1946.

At a critical juncture in both our countries' history, they willingly responded to the urgent call of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and left their families and homes for an uncertain fate.

They fought valiantly, bravely and with uncommon courage, against great odds and lacking the support that they had been promised.

Out of the 470,000 reported by the VA in 1946 less than 20,000 remain—13,000 in the Philippines and 7,000 in the United States.

Those who remain have very little time left. Many are sick and infirm.

I ask, on behalf of a nation that has stood by yours in the name of freedom, liberty and democracy in World War II, in the uncertain decades after, and in facing today's new and grave challenges, to let these old soldiers finally leave the field of battle, with their dignity intact and with the honor that they so truly deserve.

Thank you.

Legal, Moral and Historical Basis for Filipino Veterans Full Equity

We have based our arguments on the following facts verifiable from U.S. Congress archives:

1. *The Philippines Was Then a Colony of the U.S.*—The Philippines was then a colony of the U.S. and the U.S. President, under the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 (also known as the Philippine Independence Act of 1934) was vested with the authority to call the Philippine Commonwealth Army and other forces so organized to serve under the U.S. Army. This power was in fact exercised by President Franklin Roosevelt on July 26, 1941 when U.S.-Japan war became imminent.
2. *The U.S. Assumed Command of All Forces*—Shortly thereafter, General MacArthur, having been designated the Commander of the newly organized United States Army Forces in the Far East with Headquarters in Manila, issued an order assuming command of all U.S. Army Forces in the Philippines including the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines.
3. *Public Law 79-301 was Grossly Unfair*—On February 18, 1946, barely 5 months before the scheduled Independence of the Philippines, Public Law 79-301, now famously known as the Rescission Act of 1946, was enacted into law by the U.S. Government. Included in this rider was the appropriation of \$200M to the Philippine Army with the proviso that “service in the organized military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines while such forces were in the service of the Armed Forces of the United States pursuant to the military order of the President of the United States dated July 26, 1941, shall not be deemed to be or to have been service in the military or naval forces of the U.S. or any component thereof for any law of the U.S. conferring rights, privileges or benefits upon any such person by reason of service of such person or any other person in the military or naval forces of the U.S. or any component thereof.”
4. *Key U.S. Officials Admitted Eligibility for Equity*—During the hearing for Public Law 79-301 the head of the U.S. Veterans Administration was called to testify. His testimony included the following: there were 472,000 Filipino WWII veterans in 1946, they were eligible to VA benefits (THE SERVICE OF THE FILIPINO COMMONWEALTH ARMY INTO THE U.S. ARMED SERVICES DURING WWII HAVE MET THE STATUTORY DEFINITION OF A U.S. VETERAN), and it would cost the U.S. \$3.2B: to cover Filipino WWII veterans on equal basis with their American counterparts.

- a. *Statement of President Harry S. Truman Clearly Recognized that Filipino Veterans Deserved Equity*—Before signing P.L. 79-301 into law, President Harry S. Truman stated:
- b. The effect of this rider is to bar Philippine Army veterans from all benefits under the GI Bill of Rights with the exception of disability and death benefits.
- c. The passage and approval of this legislation does not release the U.S. from its moral obligation to provide for the heroic Philippine veterans who sacrificed so much for the common cause during the war.
- d. Philippine Army veterans are nationals of the U.S. and will continue in that status until July 4, 1946. They fought as American nationals, under the American flag, and under the direction of our military leaders.
- e. It is a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Philippine Army veterans.

**Statement of Ronald R. Aument, Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits,
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to be here today to discuss the benefits the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides to World War II Filipino veterans. I am pleased to be accompanied by Dr. Robert Wiebe, Director of the Veterans Integrated Service Network 21.

Historical Background

For purposes of VA benefits and services, members of the Philippine armed forces can be categorized as having served in one of four groups: Regular Philippine Scouts, Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts. These four categories of World War II Filipino veterans and their eligibility for VA benefits are best understood in a historical context.

In 1901, the United States established the **Regular Philippine Scouts**, a force that Congress soon thereafter incorporated into the United States Army. Individuals who served in the Regular Philippine Scouts and their survivors have always been entitled to the same VA benefits as veterans of the United States Armed Forces.

In 1934, Congress passed the Philippine Independence Act, which provided for the self-government of the Philippines after a period of 10 years. Because of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines and World War II, independence was conferred on July 4, 1946. The Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines established the Philippine Army in 1935. Pursuant to the 1934 Act, the United States reserved the right to call into service any forces organized by the Philippine government. In July 1941, President Roosevelt exercised this authority by calling into service all organized military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines. These **Commonwealth Army** members began serving on or after July 26, 1941 and ended their service on or before June 30, 1946.

After the May 7, 1942 surrender of the Philippine Islands to the Japanese, the residual elements of the United States military in the Philippines and members of the Philippine Army formed **guerrilla** units. Recognized guerrilla units fought alongside the United States military from April 20, 1942 until June 30, 1946. After the liberation of the Philippine Islands, individuals who fought in recognized guerrilla units were given membership status in the Commonwealth Army or the United States Armed Forces.

Following the Japanese surrender in 1945, Congress authorized the Secretary of War to enlist Philippine citizens into the United States Armed Forces. The **New Philippine Scouts** participated in the occupation of Japan from October 6, 1945, until June 30, 1947.

In 1946, Congress declared veterans of the Commonwealth Army and New Philippine Scouts and their survivors to be eligible for benefits under VA programs of National Service Life Insurance, disability compensation, and death compensation. Congress limited the rates of disability and death compensation to the equivalent of 50 cents on the U.S. dollar. Congress did not authorize eligibility for VA need-based pension, health care, or readjustment benefits. In 1958, Congress made former members of the organized guerrilla units eligible for VA benefits on the same basis as Commonwealth Army veterans.

Legislative history indicates that benefits were limited to 50 cents on the dollar in recognition of the different standards of living in the United States and the Philippines. Congress also anticipated that the newly independent Republic of the Philippines would rightfully assume additional responsibilities for its veterans. Within months of gaining independence, the Philippine government began developing a fair-

ly extensive program of veterans' benefits including compensation for service-connected death and disability, education benefits, reemployment rights, preference in public employment, home loans, and hospitalization benefits.

VBA Benefits Currently Provided to World War II Filipino Veterans

Veterans who served in the Regular Philippine Scouts qualify for the full range of VA benefits and services as veterans of the United States Armed Forces. Under legislation enacted over the past 6 years, veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, and New Philippine Scouts who lawfully reside in the United States and are U.S. citizens or aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residency in the United States now qualify for disability compensation at the full U.S. dollar rate. They also have eligibility for VA health care and burial benefits similar to other veterans of the United States Armed Forces. The survivors of veterans who served in the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, or New Philippine Scouts who reside in the United States and are U.S. citizens or legally admitted resident aliens qualify for dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC) benefits at the full-dollar rate. If the veteran or survivor does not meet the above residency requirements, VA pays disability compensation, DIC, and burial benefits based on the half-dollar rate.

Chronological Summary of Recent Legislative Changes

In October 2000, Congress enacted legislation that expanded VA benefits for veterans of the Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla units. Veterans of the Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla units now qualify for disability compensation at the full-dollar rate, provided that the veteran is lawfully residing in the United States and is a United States citizen or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States. In addition, the bill extended VA hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care to veterans of the Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla units in cases where the veteran lawfully resides in the United States and is a United States citizen or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States and receiving VA compensation. Congress also authorized the Manila VA Outpatient Clinic to provide medical services to service-connected veterans for their non-service-connected disabilities.

In November 2000, Congress passed the Veterans Benefits and Health Care Improvement Act of 2000, expanding eligibility for interment in national cemeteries to veterans of the Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla forces if the veteran resided in the United States at the time of death and was a United States citizen or alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States. Congress also authorized VA to pay the full-dollar amount for burial benefits to veterans who met the above residency requirements and were also receiving VA disability compensation or would have met the disability and income requirements for VA pension.

On December 6, 2003, Congress extended full VA health care eligibility to veterans of the New Philippine Scouts residing in the United States and removed the requirement that veterans of the Commonwealth Army and recognized guerrilla veterans, who are residing in the United States, must be in receipt of compensation in order to qualify for VA treatment of non-service-connected disabilities.

On December 16, 2003, Congress enacted the Veterans Benefits Act of 2003, which expanded compensation benefit payments and burial benefit payments to the full-dollar rate for New Philippine Scouts if they are either United States citizens or lawfully admitted permanent resident aliens, and made New Philippine Scouts eligible for other burial benefits including interment in national cemeteries. In addition, Congress expanded DIC benefits to the full-dollar rate for survivors of veterans who served in the New Philippine Scouts, the Philippine Commonwealth Army, or recognized guerrilla forces, provided that the survivor is residing in the United States and is either a United States citizen or a legally admitted alien. Congress also extended the authority to maintain a regional office in the Republic of the Philippines until December 2009.

The result of the above laws is that veterans and survivors of the Philippine Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla forces, and the New Philippine Scouts who lawfully reside in the United States are eligible for disability compensation, DIC, burial benefits, and VA health care to the same extent as veterans and survivors of the United States Armed Forces.

Veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts are not eligible for VA pensions or readjustment benefits such as home loan guaranties, education benefits, vocational rehabilitation, adaptive housing grants, and adaptive vehicle grants. Survivors or dependents of veterans of the

Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts are not eligible for death pension or education benefits.

Health Care in the Philippines

Veterans of the United States Armed Forces and Regular Philippine Scouts residing in the Philippines can obtain hospital care and outpatient medical services if such care and services are needed for the treatment of a service-connected disability. Service-connected United States veterans and Regular Philippine Scouts can obtain outpatient medical services at the Manila VA Outpatient Clinic for any condition as long as it is within the services provided by the Clinic.

The United States has provided assistance to the Philippines in a number of different ways in order to facilitate the provision of medical care to World War II Filipino veterans. VA has historically provided grants in the form of monetary support or equipment to the Veterans Memorial Medical Center (VMMC) in Manila. In June 2002, VA announced that \$500,000 would be provided annually to furnish, install, and maintain equipment at the VMMC. In 2006, Secretary Nicholson provided a \$500,000 grant to upgrade equipment for the VMMC. Since 2002, VA has contributed over \$3.5 million to the VMMC. VA provided the funding under its authority to assist the Philippine government in fulfilling its obligation to provide medical care for Filipino veterans who fought with the United States Armed Forces in World War II. VA worked directly with the VMMC to identify the highest equipment priorities. VA directly purchases the equipment and assures that it is properly installed and maintained.

The Manila Regional Office

The Manila Regional Office (RO) is responsible for administering a wide range of benefits and services for veterans, their families, and their survivors residing in the Philippines, including compensation, pension, DIC, education benefits, and vocational rehabilitation and employment services. The Manila RO has jurisdiction over all cases involving veterans of the Commonwealth Army, recognized guerrilla units, and New Philippine Scouts, no matter where they reside.

As of January 2007, the Manila RO provides disability compensation, pension, and DIC to approximately 17,000 veterans and survivors. This includes 6,400 veterans who receive disability compensation, of which 3,500 are World War II Filipino veterans and the remaining are United States Armed Forces veterans from all periods of service. The Manila RO also provides DIC benefits to 6,700 survivors, which includes 5,150 survivors of World War II Filipino veterans. Nearly 15,000 of the 17,000 beneficiaries paid by the Manila RO reside in the Philippines.

Our records indicate that about 690 Filipino veterans and 430 survivors of Filipino veterans currently receive benefits at the full-dollar rate based on their residence in the United States. We are very pleased that Congress has in recent years recognized the inequity of applying the payment restrictions, which were intended to reflect the different economic conditions between the Philippines and the United States, to Filipino beneficiaries residing in the United States and improved the benefits for those facing living expenses comparable to United States veterans. We believe these improvements were extremely important, as they allowed VA to maintain parity in the provision of veterans' benefits among similarly situated Filipino beneficiaries.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I greatly appreciate being here today and look forward to answering your questions.

Statement of Hon. Madeleine Z. Bordallo a Representative in Congress from the Territory of Guam

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today to testify in support of legislation that would provide for full restoration of veterans benefits to surviving World War II veterans of the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines, the Philippine Scouts, and to those individuals from the Philippines who served in United States Armed Forces organized resistance units. As a member of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus and the United States-Philippines Friendship Caucus, I strongly support H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007. I, too, commend you, Mr. Chairman, for championing during your distinguished service in this institution the restoration of benefits for Filipino veterans.

Spain ceded the Philippines, along with Guam and despite the Philippine Government having declared independence, to the United States through the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the peace agreement that ended the Spanish-American

War. The values of freedom, democratic governance and the rule of law were cherished and sought by the people of the Philippines in the early part of the 20th century. The extent to which these values were inherent in the character of the people of the Philippines was evidenced by the service and sacrifice of the approximately 200,000 of their countrymen that, upon order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, were inducted into the United States Armed Forces following the invasion of the Philippine Islands by the military forces of Imperial Japan in 1941.

These Filipino soldiers—who became known as the Philippine Scouts—served shoulder to shoulder with American servicemen fighting against the Imperial Japanese Forces. General Douglas MacArthur greatly valued the service of these Filipino soldiers. Their skills as reconnaissance men and guerilla fighters were displayed as General MacArthur ordered his forces to retreat to Bataan Peninsula and nearby Corregidor Island. There the poorly-supplied American and Filipino troops, ably led by the Philippine Scouts, mounted a heroic, storied, but ultimately abortive defense against the well-equipped forces of Imperial Japan. Many American and Filipino soldiers were captured as a result of the fall of Bataan and Corregidor. Those captured were forced to endure the Bataan death march, confinement in concentration camps, forced labor, and imprisonment on ships. Those who escaped capture were organized into guerrilla bands to resist the Imperial Japanese occupation forces.

The Filipino soldiers' abilities and commitment to the United States were displayed again as General MacArthur, then supreme commander of Allied forces in the southwest Pacific, made good on his vow to return to the Philippines to help them liberate their country from Imperial Japanese Forces. The campaign to liberate the Philippines, which began in earnest in late 1944, reportedly included some of the bloodiest fighting of the Second World War. Filipino soldiers, throughout the course of that bloody struggle, fought shoulder to shoulder with and died along with United States servicemembers.

Conscripted Filipino soldiers were supposed to be entitled then to full veterans' benefits and they were so promised in the name of the good faith of the United States Government. Congress, however, withheld these benefits from them with the passage of the Rescission Acts of 1946. In 1990, many of these veterans were extended the opportunity to become United States citizens. Reportedly, nearly 24,000 veterans chose to do so. Full veterans' benefits, however, have never been extended to them. The enactment of H.R. 760 would correct this mistake and remedy this injustice.

The Congressional Research Service, in a January 10, 2006, report entitled, "The Republic of the Philippines: Background and U.S. Relations" states that approximately 30,000 of 200,000 Filipino veterans of the Second World War are still alive, of whom 7,000 reside in the United States. While estimates may vary what we do know to be fact today is that there are fewer and fewer surviving Filipino veterans of the Second World War with each passing year. The need for Congress to honor their service by enacting H.R. 760 is now more important than ever. If signed into law, H.R. 760 would fulfill our country's long overdue commitment to these loyal and honorable veterans. We must act now to fulfill the United States Government's responsibilities to those who served willingly and ably in the defense of freedom. Filipino veterans deserve no less than our best commitment to bring them equity and justice in the name of the good faith of the United States Government.

I urge this Committee to favorably report your legislation Mr. Chairman to the full House as soon as possible. Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Buyer, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to appear before you today to add my voice in support of this most worthy cause. It is a privilege and an honor to join our colleagues on this panel and to cosponsor H.R. 760.

**Statement of Hon. Mazie K. Hirono
a Representative in Congress from the State of Hawaii**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the matter of equity for Filipino veterans of World War II. This is an important issue for me and many families in Hawaii.

As you know, Filipino veterans are those that honorably answered the call of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and served alongside our armed forces during World War II. They fought shoulder to shoulder with American servicemen; they sacrificed for the same just cause. We made a promise to provide full veterans' benefits to those who served with our troops. And while we have made appreciable

progress toward fulfilling that promise, we have not yet achieved the full equity that the Filipino veterans deserve.

I am proud to be an original cosponsor of H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007, which was introduced by the Chairman to provide the necessary reclassification of the service of Filipino veterans to make them eligible for all the veterans' benefits programs administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs. In essence, H.R. 760 makes good on the promise our government made to these brave men over sixty years ago.

Today, out of the 250,000 veterans, only 22,000 remain and of that number 2,000 reside in my home State of Hawaii. As Filipino veterans are entering the sunset years of their lives, Congress is running out of time to fulfill our obligations to them.

I would also like to take this time to discuss an effort that I am jointly working on with Senator Daniel K. Akaka to provide for the expedited reunification of the families of our Filipino veterans. Prospective family-based immigration applicants from the Philippines face substantial, often decade-long waits for visas. It is our aim to introduce a bill that would further the recognition of the service of Filipino veterans by granting their children a special immigration status that would allow them to immigrate to the United States and be reunified with their aging parents.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to speak today on the need to fulfill our obligations to our Filipino World War II veterans.

**Statement of Hon. Michael Honda
a Representative in Congress from the State of California**

Chairman Filner, Ranking Member Buyer, and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this critically important hearing concerning the injustice done to some of the bravest men to have fought on behalf of the United States, the Filipino WWII veterans. Mr. Chairman, I also commend you for your tireless leadership on efforts to rectify this situation and for reintroducing H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

As Members of the Committee know, I have been a vocal advocate for the equitable treatment of Filipino WWII veterans. I consider the rescission of U.S. military status from approximately 250,000 Filipino WWII veterans who fought under U.S. command as one of the greatest injustices ever perpetrated by the Congress. After six decades of disgrace, we have the responsibility to correct this injustice and honor their service and sacrifice, and our window of opportunity to make these brave veterans whole is rapidly closing.

In 1934, when the Philippine Islands were a U.S. territory, Congress enacted Public Law 73-127 requiring the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines to respond to the call of the U.S. President. On July 26, 1941, with the Nation facing the threat of Japanese aggression in the Pacific, that call to arms came when President Franklin Roosevelt signed a military order for the Commonwealth Army to serve with the U.S. Army Forces—Far East (USAFFE), under the command of U.S. military leaders. These Filipino soldiers bravely fought alongside their American brothers in arms until the end of WWII.

With the enactment of P.L. 79-190 in 1945, Congress recruited an additional 50,000 Filipino soldiers, known as the New Philippine Scouts, in anticipation of needing occupation forces for captured enemy territories. At the time of recruitment, the U.S. Government promised that all that responded to the call would be treated as U.S. veterans for the purposes of their benefits.

In 1946, just after the conclusion of the war, Congress rescinded this promise, turning their backs only on the brave Filipino veterans. When passing the First and Second Supplemental Surplus Appropriations Rescission Acts, commonly referred as the Rescission Acts, Congress sought to reduce the amount of previously appropriated funds devoted to the war effort. Within these bills, however, contained specific provisions that declared that service by the members of the Commonwealth Army and the New Philippine Scouts should not be deemed to have been service in the U.S. military, effectively stripping the Filipino soldiers of their U.S. veteran status.

Although President Harry Truman signed both Rescission Acts into law, he recognized the heroic contributions of the Filipino soldiers and requested that efforts be made to correct the injustice:

“The passage and approval of this legislation do not release the United States from its moral obligation to provide for the heroic Philippine veterans who sacrificed so much for the common cause during the war.”

Since 1946, piecemeal benefits have been hard-won by the Filipino WWII veterans. However, full veteran benefits are still denied. To correct the injustice, I have been a steadfast supporter of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, which would provide the full benefits promised to all Filipino veterans who fought under U.S. command during WWII. I am encouraged by the Chairman's dedication to facilitating quick passage of this legislation and the large number of Members participating in this hearing.

As Chairman of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, I can also voice the Caucus's united support on this concern. We have prioritized the plight of the Filipino WWII veterans as a top legislative goal. CAPAC will continue to work to educate and recruit support from our colleagues and the public.

Other Members may cite the cost of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act as an obstacle, but who among us can refute the injustice that has been done? Congress must return the promised veteran status to the courageous WWII Filipino soldiers. During the war, there were nearly 250,000 Filipino soldiers who had served under U.S. command. At this point, only an estimated 22,000 are still living. To put things in perspective, the funding necessary to provide these remaining Filipino veterans with full equity of benefits is roughly equal to what we are currently spending in 1 or 2 days in Iraq. Must we wait for more of these deserved Filipinos to pass away to justify the cost? Is this how we should repay our courageous veterans?

Mr. Chairman, these WWII heroes are in the twilight of their lives, and time is running out for Congress to recognize their service. A promise made should be a promise kept, especially when it comes to veterans. If we are to be a legislative body dedicated to the ideals of justice and dignity, then it is imperative we honor the promise made to our Filipino veterans, and restore their benefits.

Thank you.

Statement of Lt. Col. Edwin Price Ramsey, AUS (Ret.), Los Angeles, CA

Chairman Filner and Honorable Members of the House of Representatives Committee on Veterans Affairs:

My name is Edwin Price Ramsey, I came from Los Angeles to attend this hearing and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you here today. Having appeared before the Committee on November 5, 1993 and again on July 2, 1998, and since I will turn 90 years of age on May 9th of this year, I will never have another chance to contribute in some small way, to correcting a longstanding gross injustice to the Filipino Veterans of World War II.

To do so, it is important that you be aware of why I had a unique position during that time and have considerable knowledge in this matter.

In 1941, I was a lieutenant in the 26th Cavalry Regiment, Philippine Scouts, with whom I fought from the Japanese Landing in Lingayen Gulf through the Battle of Bataan. After Bataan surrendered on April 9, 1942, my troop commander, Capt. Joseph R. Barker II and I escaped and made our way to Pampanga Province in Central Luzon, where we met Col. Claude Thorp whom General MacArthur had sent out of Bataan to establish resistance behind the enemy lines. We joined Col. Thorp and began the Guerrilla forces in Central Luzon designated by Col. Thorp to be the "East Central Luzon Guerrilla area" under the "Luzon Guerrilla Army Forces" of Thorp. After the capture of both Thorp and Barker, and their later execution, in early January 1943, I became the commander of the "East Central Luzon Guerrilla Area" (ECLGA). By the liberation of Central Luzon, it had grown to approximately 45,000 guerrilla troops.

With that background, I would like to address the question of the status of Filipino veterans and their treatment, especially with respect to the Recession Acts of 1946.

In July of 1941, President Roosevelt authorized, through the War Department, the formation of the "United States Army Forces in the Far East" (USAFFE) under the command of General Douglas MacArthur and ordered the induction of the military forces of the Commonwealth of the Philippines into and as part of USAFFE. It is impossible to see how these Philippine troops could be federalized into the USAFFE and not be part of the United States Army. Further, when we inducted the Filipinos into the guerrilla forces, we required that they all swear an oath of allegiance to the United States of America and the Commonwealth of the Philippines. Therefore, all those guerrillas that were *recognized* after the liberation would have the same status. In that connection, I question why there was a difference in the treatment accorded to the 65,000 or so Commonwealth of Puerto Rico troops and those from

Hawaii and elsewhere, who served in the U.S. Army and were later treated the same as American Veterans.

The USAFFE forces fought courageously, delaying the Japanese time table for several months, instead of the 6 weeks General Homma had been given by the Japanese High Command to conquer Bataan. Also, remember that only the Filipinos remained loyal to their former colonial masters while the Indo-Chinese turned on the French, the Indonesians the Dutch, and Malaya and Burma turned on the British. It was this unbelievable loyalty that provided the environment necessary to build the massive guerrilla forces that made it impossible for the Japanese to defend, in any serious way, against the liberating Allied Forces and ultimately saved thousands of American and Allied lives. General MacArthur personally confirmed this to me in a meeting I had with him in Tokyo in March of 1947. At that time, he gave me an autographed photo signed, "To Ramsey with the Admiration and Affection of His Old Comrade in Arms, Douglas MacArthur." My most prized memento.

For the sake of brevity, since we have so little time today, for more detail, please refer to my previous testimonial letters submitted in the earlier hearings on November 5, 1993 and July 22, 1998 and were incorporated in the hearing records. I would especially call your attention to the paragraphs on page 4 of my letter re: the July 22, 1998 hearing, referring to President Roosevelt's message to Congress on October 6, 1943, calling for our government to provide full rehabilitation of the Philippines at the conclusion of the war.

In accordance with the rules of the House of Representatives' requirement for witnesses, I have appended hereto a copy of my curriculum vitae and I hereby affirm that I have had no federal grants or contract with the government within the current or past many years.

Edwin Price Ramsey

**Statement of Colonel Romeo M. Monteyro, PA (Ret.), Advisor
Filipino World War II Veterans Federation of San Diego County, Vista, CA**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for inviting me here today. In the next 5 minutes, allow me to dwell on a particular subject—the loyalty of the Filipinos to America, before, during and beyond World War II.

Private Tomas Claudio, a Filipino, was a member of the American Expeditionary Forces which fought in France in World War I. A mere footnote in history, he is unknown to Americans, but U.S. Army records place him as the first Filipino to die for America. He was a farmworker in California when America entered the First World War. He need not enlist, but he did, out of patriotism and love for his adoptive country.

Then there was Jose Abad Santos, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Philippine Commonwealth. He became the caretaker of the Commonwealth government after President Manuel L. Quezon was ordered out by President Roosevelt. The enemy caught up with him in Lanao, Mindanao and was told to publicly renounce his allegiance to America and pledge loyalty to the Japanese government. When he refused he was tried by a kangaroo court and was sentenced to die by firing squad. On the eve of his execution, he told his son, "Do not cry my son. Show these people that you are brave. Not everyone is given a chance to die for his country." The loyal and brave Chief Justice chose to die for America.

In the movie "The Great Raid" the loyalty of the Filipinos to America was depicted factually. Filipino civilians risked their lives by smuggling food, medicine and money to starving and sick American prisoners of war. Resistance fighters blocked a stronger Japanese force and prevented it from reinforcing the prison guards at Cabanatuan City, paving the way for the successful rescue of more than 500 American POWs by a battalion of U.S. Army Rangers.

President Harry S. Truman said, as he reluctantly signed the Rescission Act of 1946, "**This does not absolve America of its moral obligations to the Filipino veterans.**"

President Bill Clinton commented, during the awards ceremony for WWII Congressional Medal of Honor recipients of Japanese and Filipino descent, 59 years late, "**rarely has a country been so well served by a people it has so ill-treated. They risked their lives above and beyond the call of duty, and in so doing they did more than defend America. In the face of painful prejudice, they helped define America at its best.**"

In Bataan, soldier-poet Lieutenant Henry G. Lee wrote this poem after he watched a haggard group of Philippine Commonwealth Army troops:

*Obsolete rifle without a sling
And a bolo tied with a piece of string
Coconut hat and canvas shoes
And shoddy, dust white, denim blues
These are the men who fought and fled
And fought again and left their dead
Who fought and died as the white man planned
And never quite learn to understand
Poorly officered, under fed
Often driven but never led
Lied to, and cheated and sent to die
For a foreign flag in their native sky.*

Lieutenant Lee survived Bataan, the Death March and even the POW camp atrocities but was ironically killed by American bombs dropped on the ship transporting him to Japan.

Owed a moral obligation! Served well though ill-treated, subjected to painful prejudice! Lied to and cheated and sent to die, for a foreign flag in their native sky! Yet they remained steadfastly loyal!

Ladies and gentlemen of this Committee, isn't it high time the Filipino soldiers who fought for America in World War II, be rewarded, if only for their loyalty? I know it will probably be a question of money again. Former Congressman Stump who headed this Committee during his time in Congress, once asked, "And where do you suggest we get the money to pay the Filipino veterans?" My answer to that is, "from the same source which funds the Iraq war." The Iraqis have not done anything in defense of America. In fact most of them hate us, and even as we speak, are trying their best to kill American soldiers. On the other hand, the Filipino veterans fought for America and their shabby treatment notwithstanding, have remained loyal and ever ready to stand by America.

How loyal was the Filipino soldiers to America? Ask Col. Ramsey, the living testimony to their loyalty. If he had been in another country in World War II they would have turned him over to the enemy or, worse, kill him and collect the prize money on his head. Yet today, he is here with us because the Filipinos remained loyal to the U.S.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of this Committee. That concludes my testimony today.

Statement of Lourdes Santos Tancinco, Esq., Co-Chair, National Network for Veterans Equity, and Chair, San Francisco Veterans Equity Center

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Committee:

My name is Lourdes Santos Tancinco, Esq. I speak on behalf of the Veterans Equity Center and the National Network for Veterans Equity. Both organizations are part of the newly formed National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity.

I. Introduction

The Veterans Equity Center is the only nationwide service agency catering exclusively to the needs of the elderly Filipino World War II veterans. It was established in the City of San Francisco through the collaboration of community members and advocates concerned with the plight of the Filipino veterans. As of today, we have provided service to more than 1,000 veterans. The National Network for Veterans Equity is a loose coalition of different organizations including various Asian Pacific American organizations advocating justice and equity for our Filipino veterans and supporting the passage of the Full Equity Bill or currently the H.R. 760. The National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity is the only formalized coalition of organizations representing Filipino veterans in the United States and the Philippines working to pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

II. Full Equity Now

Ladies and gentlemen of this Committee, we strongly believe that only a full recognition and restoration of the full and equal benefits of all the Filipino World War II veterans will address this more than half a century of injustice brought by the Rescission Act of 1946.

As advocates for the full equity, our mission at NNVE is a firm and consistent commitment to attain full equity, no more and no less.

We face different challenges but we never shall give up. Consider the following factors:

1. Factors to Consider

- a. The population of the World War II veterans is dwindling.

Time is a critical element for the passage of this proposed legislation. It is public knowledge that the greatest generation of World War II veterans is diminishing at an accelerated rate. There are still surviving veterans waiting for full recognition of their services and for the receipt of the well deserved benefits. We have witnessed and met at the Veterans Equity Center thousands of WWII veterans and most of them who passed away had a dying wish unfulfilled. Questioning why they were treated inequitably. It is very disheartening. Time is of the essence.

- b. There is an increasing number of broad supporters from different organizations.

We are engaged in an extensive public education campaign about the bill ensuring that there is an accurate presentation of the history and the relationship of the U.S.-Philippines during World War II.

NNVE's public educational campaign resulted in increased awareness, NNVE gathered support from various individuals, organizations, state and local governments in support of the restoration of the full veterans' status to Filipino World War II Veterans.

- c. The cost of the bill.

One of the major challenges we are forced to face is the issue of the cost of the bill. It is very easy to defeat the purpose of the bill by concluding that this is an expensive bill. But is it really an expensive bill? Let us examine the following:

- The figure used to calculate the cost of this bill is inaccurate. The rate that these veterans die is faster than projected. Hence, if there is indeed a cost, it is a diminishing cost.
- The Veterans Administration figures based on its 2000 study need to be reexamined. The San Francisco Veterans Equity Center is actually witnessing a faster rate of dying veterans than as reported in the VA study.
- For those receiving welfare checks from Social Security Administration, there will only be a transfer of budget from this agency to the VA should the equity bill be passed resulting in less or no additional cost to the Federal budget.

True, there is a dollar amount to the bill the exact figure of which is not accurate at this time. If indeed the cost is an issue, our response to this argument is a question. *When is the cost of freedom ever free? How can the U.S. ever have a short memory of the sacrifices of our veterans?*

- d. A legislation less than equity will not address the veterans' issue.

Benefit improvement bills that enhance certain veteran benefits for certain veterans are not responsive to this issue. Creating disparity for those who fought equally and those who risk their lives together is a greater injustice to those who are excluded.

2. Filipino Veterans Issue an American Issue of Injustice

The plight of the Filipino veterans is no longer just a Filipino issue of injustice but an American issue of injustice that has been clamoring for final resolution. For those of us who believe in the cause of freedom and democracy, for those of us who believe in fairness to those who had fought for us, we are challenged to do what is right and advocate for what they deserve.

As previously stated, the greatest generation is fast diminishing. The younger generation is taking on this cause and until this matter is resolved it shall continue to present itself over and over again until we finally see the just resolution.

III. Conclusion

Mr. Luciano Dimaano, an 85 year old veteran who lives in San Francisco vividly remembers his experiences 65 years ago. He said and I quote him "As a soldier fighting under the U.S. flag, I never got tired of fighting. There was shortage of food, no medicine. When I fired my rifle I would stumble because my body was starving for nourishment. I was weak all the time. But I kept fighting to defend the frontline." Like thousands of other veterans, physical exhaustion did not prevent him from fighting.

We take on the fight for them. We believe in our democratic idealism and have faith that this great country shall not let the sacrifices, courage, blood and tears of

our veterans be put to waste. There is no better time to correct this historical error. The time is now. War veterans should be treated right. They deserve no less than equity!

We strongly urge this Committee to support the passage of the full equity bill for the Filipino World War II veterans. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak.

**Statement of Franco Arcebal, Vice President for Membership,
American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, Inc.**

Honorable Chairman and Members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, Good morning. My name is Franco Arcebal, a Filipino World War II veteran, and the vice president for membership of the American Coalition for Filipino Veterans, Inc. Our nonprofit non-partisan advocacy organization has more than **4,000 individual members** in the United States. I am now 83-years-old and a retired sales executive. I reside in Los Angeles.

Our president, Mr. Patrick Ganio, Sr., a Bataan and Corregidor defender in 1942 and a Purple Heart medal recipient, could not join us this morning because of his health situation. He lives in Jacksonville, Florida. His statement is included in our written testimony.

Thank you for holding this early hearing on the **Equity bill H.R. 760** for Filipino World War II veterans. Never in the history of our long quest for full recognition benefits has a hearing been scheduled within 2 weeks after its introduction.

We owe this to the Honorable Bob Filner, our undaunted and tireless champion in the House of Representatives. He and I were **arrested** along with 12 of my comrades for civil disobedience when we chained ourselves in front of the White House in July 1997. Sadly, we were unable to convince the Clinton Administration to support our Equity bill.

I am honored and pleased to present the plea of my comrades. But allow me a brief introduction.

During World War II, I was a guerrilla intelligence officer in Northern Luzon. I was caught and severely **tortured** by Japanese soldiers as a spy. I was sentenced for decapitation. Luckily for me, during a rainstorm at night, I was able to escape. I dug out a tunnel under the wall of our "monkey house."

In 1987, I became a new U.S. permanent resident. Because of my age, I had very little income. Because I had a painful dental problem, I sought treatment at the Los Angeles VA clinic.

I was terribly shocked when I was told that my services in WWII in the U.S. Army Forces, was by law deemed NOT "active service for the purposes of any benefit administered by the U.S. VA."

I concluded that the United States whom I served loyally and risked my life, did me an injustice. I felt terribly discriminated upon.

This incident was a result of the Rescission Act enacted on February 18, 1946 (now U.S. Code Title 38, Sec. 107) over the objections of President Harry Truman. Before this law Filipino veterans had U.S. veterans status with the VA.

Today, I expect many persuasive testimonies to justify the passage of H.R. 760. I join them because of my duty to speak on behalf of my comrade veterans who are elderly, disabled and poor.

Our Coalition leaders view the **EQUITY bill in five parts**. They are:

1. **U.S. recognition of our WWII service,**
2. **VA burial benefits,**
3. **War injury compensation,**
4. **VA health care, and**
5. **NON-service connected disability pension.**

Over the past decade, our coalition's mission is to restore FULL U.S. Government recognition and to **win equitable U.S. V.A. benefits** for our veterans. We believe that by passing the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act," or the realistic bills of our sponsors, we can finally overcome the discriminatory effects of the "Rescission Act."

Why should Filipino veterans be officially recognized for VA benefits?

FIRST, on July 26, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered soldiers of the Philippine Commonwealth Army who were then U.S. nationals into military service.

SECOND, before the Rescission Act of February 18, 1946, the VA considered us as American veterans with "active service" status.

THIRD, 24,000 Filipino WWII veterans were naturalized based on their U.S. military service under Section 405 of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1990.

FOURTH, under Public Law 106-419, if they died, they are eligible for burial benefits with military honors in national cemeteries as U.S. veterans.

FIFTH, under P.L. 108-170, Filipino American veterans can now be admitted as patients in VA hospitals, clinics and nursing homes; however, they are not eligible for non-war related disability pensions that American counterparts receive.

We deeply appreciate the steadfast leadership of Sen. Daniel Inouye, Sen. Daniel Akaka, Sen. Arlen Specter, former Rep. Benjamin Gilman, Rep. Bob Filner, Rep. Chris Smith, Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald, Rep. Darrell Issa, Rep. Rob Simmons, Rep. Nancy Johnson and others.

With our step-by-step strategy, your Committee and the Senate have passed Filipino veteran bills worth **\$38 Million in yearly benefits:**

We have supported several bills and budget proposals to win the last step of **VA non-service connected pension** that would provide a dignified income to our veterans to bring them above poverty in the Philippines and in the U.S. and fully recognize their U.S. military service. These proposals were:

1. \$100 monthly pension 2001 proposal of Sen. Daniel Inouye's bill S. 68 and Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald's "Fairness bill." Philippine President Gloria Arroyo had officially requested this pension from President Bush;
2. **\$200 monthly** proposal of Rep. Lane Evans \$22M budget request in 2005 for vets in the Philippines and in the U.S. (Rep. Nancy Pelosi endorsed); and,
3. \$100 VA medical care monthly allowance for Filipino vets in the Philippines that our coalition had proposed to VA Secretary Anthony Principi in 2004.

OUR REQUESTS TO THE VA COMMITTEE

FIRST: Pass or mark up the final **authorizing language** of the EQUITY BILL with strong bi-partisan support of the Committee.

SECOND: Seek an estimated **budget item of \$18 to \$22 Million** from the Bush Administration, VA Secretary Jim Nicholson and the Appropriation Committees to provide an equitable monthly pension of at least \$200 for us low-income Filipino WWII veterans.

THIRD: Form a **task force** of representatives of the HVAC, the VA Secretary, the Philippine Ambassador and the key veteran organizations to determine within 45 days the current Filipino veteran populations, assess their economic and health needs and to provide a realistic budget request.

We yearn and pray this **reasonable package of benefits be authorized and granted** within the context of H.R. 760. We trust our requests be favorably considered.

Let me close by quoting President Truman on February 20, 1946 when he objected to the "Rescission Act":

"The Philippine Army veterans are nationals of the United States and will continue in that status until July 4, 1946. They fought under the American flag and under the direction of our military leaders. They fought with gallantry under the most difficult conditions. ... They were commissioned by us. Their official organization the army of the Philippine Commonwealth was taken into the Armed Forces of the United States on July 26, 1941. That order has never been revoked nor amended. I consider it a moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Filipino veterans."

THANK YOU.

[The prepared statement and attachment of Patrick G. Ganio, Sr., follows:]

**Statement of Patrick G. Ganio, Sr., National President,
American Coalition for Filipino Veterans**

Mr. Chairman, Honorable Members of the Committee, Fellow Veterans and friends,

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to testify once more, perhaps our last to be heard of our appeal to this Congress and this Administration to pass the pension benefit for Filipino WWII veterans in true spirit of fairness and justice.

There should be no doubt about the strength of our bonds of friendship as tested in the great battles of Bataan and Corregidor as well as the resistance of the Filipino people during the Japanese occupation of the Philippines.

After the war, time has brought changes in the lives and men and nations where this great country is no exception.

For in the Philippines after the war, the United States created a new outlook in the 79th Congress when it passed the Rescission Act of 1946 that stripped our Filipino veterans of their honor and benefits.

Mr. Chairman, it is comforting to feel that America cares for those who bore the battle. But as we think of the supreme sacrifices we paid for serving under the American flag, it is shocking and painful to think that in our low moments to feel **betrayed** from a friend we trust.

Mr. Chairman, what happened to the principles and values of right and justice tutored us in this democracy fathered to us by America?

But democracy takes a long route. Hence we are still fighting for our rights. And in the long process, we have been able to win several benefits that we deserve under mutually acceptable circumstances and justified by our common interests.

Mr. Chairman, pass our Equity Pension bill at the end of our lifetime. This testimony is our last cry for justice. Be this our valedictory appeal that this Congress and this Administration **be generous enough** to pass our pension bill to end once and for all our long struggle.

For tomorrow, we may not pass this way again.

Very sincerely yours, Patrick Ganio, Sr.

Office of the Governor, State of California
Sacramento, CA 95814
December 8, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing in strong support of bipartisan legislation currently pending in Congress that would address the inequity in current law by providing full veterans' benefits to Filipino veterans who served at the request and under the command of the U.S. military in World War II. The *Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2005* (H.R. 302/S. 146) has broad support in Congress and a similar bill considered by the last Congress which is sponsored by over 200 Members of the House.

While an estimated 300,000 Filipino veterans served in the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) in World War II, a federal law was passed in 1946 that rescinded their eligibility for veteran's benefits. Currently, less than 30,000 Filipino veterans live in the United States and the Philippines. Most are not entitled to the full array of benefits offered to fellow American veterans—specifically Disability Pension benefits. These benefits were promised to and earned by these veterans, but the promise was not fulfilled after the war.

This inequity exists today. The *Filipino Veterans Equity Act* would fully recognize the military service of these veterans to this nation. An existing budget proposal in the House of Representatives would provide them with a modest \$200 monthly disability pension to complement the VA health care benefits that Congress had restored in 2003 upon your Administration's request.

Action is needed this Congress because the number of surviving Filipino veterans of World War II decreases with each passing year. I feel the United States Government should recognize the military service of these veterans and provide them the benefits they deserve. While Congress has adopted legislation that provides a limited number of benefits to some of these veterans, the *Filipino Veterans Equity Act* would eliminate gaps in coverage that remain and would ensure all Filipino veterans receive the same benefits available to American veterans of that war.

I know that you share my commitment to our nation's veterans and ask that you join me in supporting efforts to give these veterans their *long overdue recognition and the benefits* they deserve.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor

Office of the Governor, State of California
 Sacramento, CA 95814
October 30, 2006

The President
 The White House
 Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

During World War II, more than 200,000 Filipino soldiers fought beside American troops to restore liberty and democracy to their homeland in the war against Japan. The bravery and sacrifice of these Filipino veterans contributed to our victory in World War II. While the Immigration Act of 1990 allowed these Filipino veterans the opportunity to become citizens of the United States, the law did not extend this benefit to their adult sons and daughters, many of whom have been on immigration waiting lists for several years.

With just 6,000 Filipino World War II veterans still alive in the United States, I ask you to join me in supporting House Resolution 901. This bill would give priority in the issuance of *immigrant visas to the sons and daughters of Filipino World War II veterans who are naturalized citizens of the United States*. Given that the youngest of these veterans are in their eighties, reuniting these families is particularly important.

The United States has a proud tradition of recognizing the sacrifices made by our veterans. House Resolution 901 is our opportunity to recognize and reward the remarkable courage and dedication of the Filipino-American veterans who fought for our country during World War II.

Sincerely,

Arnold Schwarzenegger
 Governor

Statement of Susan Dilkes, Executive Director, Filipino American Services Group, Inc., and Member, National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity

Good Morning! First of all, I would like to thank the Veteran's Affairs Committee Chairman Bob Filner, Members of the Committee and Congressman Bob Filner's staff for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Susan Espiritu Dilkes. I am the daughter of a Filipino World War II veteran and a member of the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity. I am also the Executive Director of Filipino American Service Group Inc. (FASGI), a non-profit, community-based, and social service agency in Los Angeles County which was started in October 1981, when a homeless Filipino World War II veteran was found sleeping in the garage at the home of Mrs. Remedios Geaga, one of the founding members of our agency. Since then, FASGI has assisted thousands of Filipino American World War II veterans with temporary shelter, health and mental health issues, food distribution, and others. FASGI operates a transitional housing shelter for independent living for more than four hundred World War II veterans and in 1996, with the help of the Filipino American WWII veteran's volunteers, FASGI launched the FILVOTE, Filipino American Voters Mobilization, and has registered more than 13,000 Filipino American voters in Los Angeles County.

Last year, 2006, the Filipino-American Service Group, Inc. (FASGI) obtained a grant from State of California Department of Community Services and Development Community Services Block to outreach Filipino-American veterans who are still alive and living in Los Angeles. The goal of the outreach is to reduce the risks of poor health resulting from inadequate housing, and to refer homeless Filipino American WWII veterans to our shelter and to our Healthy Active Lifestyle Program (HALP) and to assist and to advocate for their benefits that were promised to them by the government of the U.S. in 1942 by Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt. For the past 12 months, FASGI has worked at this outreach program but has referred only six WWII Filipino American veterans to our transitional housing shelter, because there are few of the veterans left. These men are now in their 80's and many are in very poor health.

If Congress does not act soon, there will be no one left. This is your last chance to correct a wrong, which is now more than half a century old. I believe you are men and women of good intention, and now it is time for those intentions to be converted into law.

Indeed, there are benefits beyond those that are visible on the face of this legislation. First, the passing of H.R. 760, granting full equity benefits for the Filipino American WWII veterans, provides the United States with an opportunity to rescue its reputation as a fair, honest and reputable country that honors its commitment. By helping the remaining 5,000 Filipino American World War II veterans who are living in the United States, our country can take a long step toward rescuing its own honor.

Second, passing H.R. 760 improves the foreign relations between the Philippines and the United States. It reduces the political irritation of an unfulfilled commitment to the 13,000 Filipino American World War II veterans who are living in the Philippines, and to the extent payments are made, it will improve flow of cash to the Philippines, a poor country in dire need of foreign support and liquidity.

This is the last chance any of us will have to *RESCUE* both the Filipino American World War II Veterans and the United States from a broken promise.

Thank you and please enact and promptly implement H.R. 760.

**Statement of Alma Q. Kerns, National Chair,
National Federation of Filipino American Associations (NAFFAA)**

Good morning.

I thank you, Congressman Filner and all Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, for this historic hearing on the Filipino Veterans Equity Bill of 2007.

I am deeply honored to speak on behalf of the National Federation of Filipino American Associations. Founded 10 years ago, our Federation aims to empower the 2.4 million Filipinos in America to become active participants and leaders in all aspects of U.S. society. The Filipino population is among the fastest growing ethnic groups in the country today, with one of the highest naturalization rates and a 76 percent nationwide voter turn out. We have significant concentrations of Filipino Americans in almost every congressional district throughout the nation. I don't exaggerate when I say that there is a Filipino in every town and city in the United States—each one contributing significantly to the political, cultural, commercial and social life of this country.

I am here before you today primarily as the daughter of a World War II veteran. My father and four uncles survived the brutalities of the war, the Bataan death march, the concentration camps, malaria, typhoid, and dysentery. They have now passed on, but their bravery and their pride as soldiers have not been forgotten by us, their children and grandchildren. I owe it to them and all their comrades, the valiant Filipinos who risked their lives for the sake of freedom and democracy to stand before you today and appeal to you, our honorable legislators, to correct a tragic error of omission, and give the Filipino veterans the dignity and the recognition they deserve.

The second reason I am here today is due to a promise I made as NAFFAA's national chair to continue the struggle for the passage of the equity bill. Since NAFFAA was born 10 years ago, NAFFAA has worked closely with Filipino veterans groups and community advocates to press Congress to rescind a grievous error in judgment, a betrayal, called the Rescission Act of 1946, but Congress to this day, more than 60 years after victory was won, has not responded favorably.

I am here before you today, representing millions of Filipino Americans and Filipinos who believe that the veterans equity issue is a matter of honor and dignity not just for our veterans but for the whole Filipino American community! In Seattle where I live, I see our World War II veterans living in substandard conditions, lonely for their children and grandchildren and waiting patiently for the equity bill to pass so that they can go home. For example, Benito Valdez, 83 years old and Julian Nicolas, 85 years old, two of the last three remaining Filipinos who helped in the great raid that rescued 600 American and Canadian prisoners of war in the Cabanatuan garrison camp, live in my beloved State of Washington. These two gallant warriors, silent in their anguish and disappointment, cannot understand what is taking Congress so long to correct a broken promise.

Together with the members of the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity, I am asking you our legislators to search deep into your conscience and correct this injustice.

NAFFAA and its partners in the national alliance for Filipino veterans equity will not give up the fight for justice and equity. We will continue year after year after year, because my generation will never be at peace with ourselves if we do not tell the story of a promise unkept. We will do it because we still believe that this great country called America is still the beacon of justice and fairness in the free world.

And the time is finally here to show the whole world that this country does not forget the bravery of those who fought for its freedom.

To the esteemed Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, we hope that you will act honorably on our message—that the Filipino World War II veterans have been treated unfairly by the United States during the past 61 years. We also ask the American people to support our veterans' cause as theirs is an American issue that cries out for American justice. I now appeal to you today as our national legislators to pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Bill without delay.

Thank you!

**Statement of Alec S. Petkoff, Assistant Director,
Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission, American Legion**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the rectifying of the injustice that Filipino veterans are currently enduring. The American Legion applauds the Chairman's leadership in addressing this issue by introducing H.R. 760, the "Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007."

The American Legion supports full recognition and benefits to all veterans, American or Filipino, who were part of the defense of the Philippine Islands during World War II. The American Legion has adopted a resolution to "Support Legislation to Grant Filipino World War II Veterans Equal VA Benefits."

In 1941, at the outbreak of World War II, Filipinos were considered nationals of the United States and thousands were conscripted to serve with the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) under the command of U.S. officers headed by General Douglas MacArthur, by order of then President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

These Filipino World War II soldiers served and died with courage, loyalty and dedication to stop the Japanese invaders in Bataan and Corregidor, walked the famous Death March together with their American comrades-in-arms and continued guerilla warfare against the Japanese until the U.S. Armed Forces recaptured the Philippines in 1944.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, in VETPOP2001 revised, estimated that there were 60,000 surviving Filipino veterans who are classified as Philippine Commonwealth Army, Recognized Guerrilla and New Philippine Scouts veterans, of whom 45,000 reside permanently in the Philippines and 15,000 reside permanently in the U.S.

Of the 45,000 residing in the Philippines, 41,000 do not receive any compensation or pension benefit from VA, and most are sickly, over 70 years old and live below the poverty level. Those veterans living in the Philippines currently receive only 50 cents on the dollar as compensation for their service-connected disability medical conditions. Veterans of those groups who live in America and were members of the Regular Commonwealth Army receive their full entitlement. This is the only situation where the rate of a disability compensation for a service-connected medical condition is based solely on geographical location.

The current policy has created a virtual caste system of first- and second-class military veterans in the Philippines. These veterans fought, were wounded, became ill, became prisoners of war, were subject to torture, deprivation and starvation and many died in the service of the U.S. Armed Forces at the same rates as regular U.S. soldiers, sailors and Marines who were isolated on those islands during the Japanese occupation.

Filipino veterans have recently been somewhat successful in incrementally increasing benefits to parity with other U.S. veterans; however, the exclusion of these veterans from full benefits remains a fundamental unfairness in the law that has stood for too many years. As the numbers of these deserving veterans quickly dwindle, Congress has little time left to redress this injustice.

The American Legion gives its full support to H.R. 760. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to present The American Legion's view on this bill. This concludes my testimony.

**Statement of Richard F. Weidman, Executive Director for Policy and
Government Affairs, Vietnam Veterans of America**

Chairman Filner, Ranking Minority Member Buyer and other distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is pleased to appear here today in support of amending title 38, United States Code which would grant

pension benefits for Filipino veterans of World War II living in the U.S. and in the Philippines.

Mr. Chairman, VVA strongly believes that those brave Filipino veterans of World War II who were drafted into service by President Franklin D. Roosevelt over sixty years ago are entitled to benefits that they were promised.

Under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, these Filipino soldiers fought side-by-side with forces from the United States mainland, defending the American flag in the now-famous battles of Bataan and Corregidor. Thousands of Filipino prisoners died, both on the Bataan death March and in prisoner of war camps. The Philippines endured four long years of occupation, and after its liberation, the United States used the strategically located Commonwealth as a base from which to launch the final efforts to win the war.

With the vital participation of Filipino soldiers so evident, VVA finds it hard to believe that, soon after the war ended, the Congress of 1946 unceremoniously deprived many of the Filipino veterans of benefits and veterans' status. Prior to enactment of the "Rescission Act" on February 18, 1946, Filipino veterans were considered veterans by VA law.

Congress has an opportunity at this hearing today to correct a wrong that was perpetuated on these brave veterans almost sixty years ago. During World War II, Filipino nationals were called into military service by Executive Order of the President and fought valiantly under U.S. command to help achieve peace and freedom in the Pacific. After the war, the United States made grants to the Philippine government to provide for the needs of these veterans. In addition, some are eligible for benefits under the United States veterans system. However, many of these deserving veterans living in the United States are currently not eligible for such benefits.

VVA recognizes the leadership of this Committee to ensure that these brave men who served at our side as staunch allies are treated properly today, correcting a wrong done in 1946. VVA particularly thanks and commends you Mr. Chairman, for your strong leadership and hard work over the years on this issue which enables us to arrive at this hearing today and begin to right an unjust wrong for our Filipino veterans.

In 2000, Commonwealth Army veterans and veterans of Recognized Guerrilla Forces were offered veterans disability compensation at the full statutory rate if they are permanent legal residents of the United States. Other veterans became eligible to receive VA health care if they are permanent U.S. residents receiving disability compensation from the VA Department. Also in 2000, Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrilla veterans became eligible to be buried in VA national cemeteries if they were permanent residents of the U.S. at the time of their deaths.

In 1990 a law was passed awarding citizenship to Filipinos who had fought on the side of the United States in World War II. As a result of that legislation, about 26,000 aging veterans were naturalized as U.S. citizens. But there was nothing in the legislation about veterans' benefits. The new citizens, if they were poor, were eligible only for welfare payments on the same basis as non-veterans.

VVA believes the passage of the U.S. Rescission Act of 1946, which stated that military work of Filipino soldiers, scouts and guerrillas was not considered active service in the U.S. Armed Forces, was incorrect and this proposed legislation will address some of the flaws in that law.

Mr. Chairman, the long struggle staged by Filipino veterans demanding equity in their treatment by the United States has gone on for more than half a century. VVA strongly believes because of the aging population of the Filipino veterans there is an urgent need for this proposed legislation. Frankly, the legislation should have been enacted during the 109th Congress. As there are so few of these distinguished fighters for America's freedom left alive, the cost is negligible in comparison to the size of the Federal budget. While justice delayed has proved to be justice denied for those who have passed away, at least for those still alive, these aging Filipino soldiers who fought under the U.S. flag in World War II must be helped now, when it matters most, before they all die.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the testimony of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). I will be more than happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.

**Statement of Hon. Neil Abercrombie
a Representative in Congress from the State of Hawaii**

Chairman Filner, Ranking Member Buyer, and Members of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, thank you for allowing me to come before you today to express my deep support for H.R. 760, the "Filipino Veterans' Equity Act of 2007."

The treatment of Filipinos who fought with the United States Armed Forces in World War II is a black spot in American history. The Philippines became a United States possession after Spain ceded it as part of the treaty ending the Spanish-American War in 1898. In 1934, Congress created a 10-year timeframe for independence through the "Philippine Independence Act." However, since the Philippines remained a colonial possession until 1946 the United States retained the right to call upon military forces organized by the Philippine government into the United States Armed Forces.

On July 26, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a military order that brought the Philippine Commonwealth Forces under the control of the United States Armed Forces during World War II. These men bravely fought with our own troops during the war, and many perished or suffered severe wounds from the battles in the Western Pacific theater. After the surrender of Japan, Congress required the Philippine Forces to continue their service. Many helped occupy lands, many oversaw military operations, and many made the ultimate sacrifice to secure our victory in World War II. Yet, when wartime service ended formally in 1946 they did not receive the same benefits and the same treatment as other American soldiers.

Yet, for all their heroic and courageous actions, Congress passed the "Rescission Act" in February 1946. This essentially denied Filipino Veterans any of the benefits that their American comrades in arms received; including full access to veterans' health care, service-connected disability compensation, non-service connected disability compensation, dependent indemnity compensation, death pension, and full burial benefits. No other group of veterans has been systematically denied these benefits.

Congress has the opportunity to right this wrong. The bill before the Committee, H.R. 760, restores the benefits these brave warriors were denied. This legislation has been introduced since 1992. However, time is running out. In September 2000, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimated that the number of surviving Filipino veterans were 59,889. However, by 2010, VA estimates that their population will dwindle to just 20,000, because of their advanced age.

I, along with other members of the Hawaii Delegation support this important piece of legislation. Congress must act now for the sake of justice and to show that we Americans truly appreciate the sacrifice these men made. These heroes cannot be forgotten; they should not be dishonored. I urge the Committee to consider this bill and to report it to the House floor.

Statement of Manuel Braga, Spring Valley, California

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Committee:

When the war broke out, I was inducted into the United States Armed Forces of the Far East (USAFFE) under the command of General MacArthur. During the war, we suffered so much.

There was shortage of food, no medicine to cure the wounded and the sick. When I fired my rifle I would stumble because my body was starving for nourishment and energy. I was weak all the time. My comrades and I fought very hard and we hardly had sleep because we had to defend the frontline. We ate porridge a day, many were wounded and dead but we had to continue to fight.

We Filipinos have the longest fight. Until now we are still fighting. Since Dec. 1, 1941 up to the present all nations that joined the U.S. Army, the Chinese, Cambodians, Australians, Vietnamese are now being served their veteran benefits, but we Filipinos are not! There must be a reason why? Is it because of money, but there is money in the invasion of Iraq. Why must we veterans suffer?

America is a generous nation giving aid to all poor nations around the world. But they have forgotten their obligation to the Filipino veterans who served for this country, who have fought side-by-side with Americans. Filipinos are still fighting for equity while others who fought with us are now receiving the fruit of their sacrifice. Without veterans there is no Democracy today.

When I stepped foot in this country a bittersweet feeling came over me. I wondered when we, Filipino veterans, will receive the recognition we deserve. Right there and then I told myself I wanted to continue to fight for justice and equity. ... Luckily there are Filipinos fighting for us. I know that the younger generations

will continue to fight for us! Please continue fighting! So many of us are already old we need your voices to speak for us, to fight alongside us!! We must fight! Fight! Fight until their hearts and mind are touched by our courage and determination. ... Do not stop until Filipino veterans have received FULL EQUITY!!

Now I am 80 years old and my end is not too far ahead. We are not here to beg. We Filipinos are hardworking people, we are only after "**what is due to us.**"

The promise made by Franklin D. Roosevelt. Lord help us to open their eyes, soften their hearts, to clear their minds, and give us the recognition and justice we deserve.

I am encouraged by the leadership of Congressman Filner, Senator Inouye, Senator Akaka, and Congressman Honda. I know that the Veterans' Affairs Committee will do the right thing and the Members who walk these halls will help us get the justice we deserve. I urge the Committee to support the passage of H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007.

Thank you.

**Statement of Vanessa B.M. Vergara, Esq., Co-Chair,
Filipino Civil Rights Advocates, Chicago Chapter**

Chairman Filner and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to the House Veterans' Affairs Committee concerning an issue that is near and dear to my heart. My name is Vanessa Vergara and I am an attorney practicing law in Chicago. I am the Co-Chair of the Chicago Chapter of the Filipino Civil Rights Advocates ("FilCRA"). FilCRA is dedicated to protecting and promoting the civil rights of the Filipino community and is a proud partner in the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity. For over 10 years, I have studied, written about and actively advocated on behalf of Filipino WWII veterans who have been wrongly deprived of veteran benefits to which they were entitled by virtue of their service in the U.S. Armed Forces. In 1997, I wrote "An Assessment of U.S. Veteran Benefits for Filipino WWII Veterans" published by Harvard University's *Asian American Policy Review*—the first academic article to specifically analyze veteran benefits policy relating to Filipino WWII veterans. For your reference, I am attaching a copy of my article as Exhibit 1 to my testimony.

I first learned about the issue of Filipino WWII veterans in 1996, when I was a senior in college majoring in political science at Hamline University. In the fall of 1996, my university's political science department selected me to come to Washington, D.C. to study at American University and intern at the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Legislative Affairs. At the time, I was also working on my Senior Honor's Thesis and was desperately in search of a topic. During my internship at the Justice Department, I met an individual who recommended that I study the story of Filipino veterans who served in the U.S. military during WWII and were stripped of their veteran benefits shortly after the war ended. He told me that no one had yet formally researched this issue. Although I prided myself on being a diligent student of American history, this was the first time I had ever heard that Filipinos served in the U.S. Armed Forces during WWII and that their veteran benefits were taken away from them by Congress. In fact, I had never heard of any instance in which the United States revoked veteran benefits to soldiers who honorably served in the U.S. military.

Indeed, the history books I studied from my grade school years through college never once told the story of Filipinos who valiantly served in the U.S. military during WWII and were denied their rightful veteran benefits. While I was aware that the Philippines became a U.S. Commonwealth in 1898 as a result of the Spanish-American War, I never realized that over 200,000 Filipinos were inducted into the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East ("USAFFE") pursuant to an Executive Order issued by President Roosevelt on July 26, 1941:

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, **I hereby call and order into the service of the armed forces of the United States** ... and place under the command of a general officer, United States Army ... **all of the organized military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines.**

On the same day, General Douglas MacArthur was designated the Commanding General of the newly constituted United States Armed Forces of the Far East. Just one day after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Japan invaded the Philippines on December 8, 1941. I was also unaware that in 1946—immediately following the end

of WWII—Congress passed the Rescission Act which disqualified Filipino veterans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces during WWII from “active service” status, thereby excluding them from qualification for veteran benefits. The Rescission Act is the only instance in the twentieth century where Congress drew a distinction between veterans with regard to veteran benefits on the basis of how, where or why they served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Upon graduating from college and returning to my hometown of Chicago to attend law school at Northwestern University, I continued my involvement in local, grassroots efforts to help pass the Equity Act. My first experience actively advocating for the rights of Filipino WWII veterans took place when I was beginning law school at Northwestern. In August 1997, Senator Dale Bumpers of Arkansas, a distinguished graduate of Northwestern University School of Law, gave the welcoming convocation address to a room full of bright-eyed, eager first-year law students. Senator Bumpers spoke about his experiences as a veteran of WWII and how, after the war, he availed himself of the GI Bill which allowed him to come to Chicago to study law at Northwestern. After his speech, I spoke to Senator Bumpers about his experience fighting in WWII and if he was aware that Filipino WWII veterans who fought in the U.S. military were stripped of their veteran benefits. Having spent time in the Pacific war theater, he told me that he fought side-by-side with Filipinos during WWII but was not aware that Filipino veterans who served in the U.S. military were unable to receive veteran benefits as he did. I told Senator Bumpers about my article that had been recently published by Harvard University and whether he would consider becoming a cosponsor to the Equity Act. He asked me to send him my article and he would most certainly look into the issue. Two weeks later, I received a letter from Senator Bumpers thanking me for bringing the Equity Act to his attention and informing me that he had become a Senate cosponsor to the Equity Act.

Since my days at Northwestern, I have continued to be actively involved in the Filipino community trying to promote awareness for the plight of Filipino WWII veterans and to help pass legislation that would finally give Filipino WWII veterans the veteran benefits to which they are entitled. Through these experiences, I have also had the great fortune of meeting many Filipino WWII veterans and their families from around the country, including Washington, D.C., California, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Illinois. These veterans are heroes. I listen to their stories about when they were brave soldiers in their teens and 20's, what it was like to fight fearlessly in the face of terrible and oppressive conditions and of all the struggles, pain and sacrifice they endured during the war and brutal Japanese occupation. Many veterans suffered through treacherous military endeavors, such as the Bataan Death March and did so with great honor and valor during the grimdest moments of WWII. Most of the Filipino WWII veterans are now in their 80's and unfortunately, many live in poverty without the much-needed health and pension benefits afforded to their fellow American compatriots.

Their memories of WWII and their important role in that cause of freedom are so vivid. Every time I meet a Filipino veteran, I am struck by the deep pride they have in their military service in the U.S. Armed Forces, the love they have for America and the enduring hope that lights their eyes that before their time in this world comes to an end, America will finally make good on its word and recognize their service in the U.S. military by providing veteran benefits that are at par with the American counterparts with whom they fought side by side.

I also want you to know about Antonio Constantino—a Filipino WWII veteran who lives in public housing in Chicago. I met Mr. Constantino and his wife when my mother, sister and I were delivering senior gift baskets to needy Filipino seniors in the Chicagoland area this past Christmas. From 1943 to 1944, Mr. Constantino was in the guerilla forces, which in 1944 were absorbed into the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East—51st Infantry Regiment P.A., 24th Infantry Division U.S. Army. Mr. Constantino heroically served in the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East until 1946 when he received his discharge papers from the U.S. Army. From 1946 to 1949, Mr. Constantino then went on to serve in the New Philippine Scouts and similarly, his discharge papers from 1949 state that he was discharged by the Army of the United States.

I asked him what, if anything, he had heard during the war, regarding whether Filipino soldiers would receive veteran benefits for their service in the U.S. military. Mr. Constantino told me that during the war, he and his fellow soldiers heard repeated broadcasts on the airways by President Roosevelt who encouraged Filipinos to stand strong and fight side-by-side with Americans and that whatever benefits and pay American soldiers receive, Filipinos would also receive. President Roosevelt also said in his broadcasts that the pensions of Filipino soldiers would be the same as the pensions received by American soldiers. Mr. Constantino further told me that

General Douglas MacArthur also told Filipino soldiers the same message relayed by President Roosevelt—that Filipino soldiers would receive the same pension and benefits as their American counterparts. Mr. Constantino explained that the worst part of the war was not the battles themselves but that Filipino soldiers who died fighting in the war received nothing in terms of veteran benefits. I asked if Filipino soldiers were offered life insurance and Mr. Constantino said that National Life Insurance was offered by the U.S. military during the war—but only for a limited time—and therefore, very few Filipino soldiers were actually able to sign up for this insurance. After the war, Mr. Constantino also saw many injured Filipino veterans who were denied hospital and other veteran benefits.

As a veteran of WWII, Mr. Constantino came to the United States with his wife in 1992 pursuant to an immigration law that permitted Filipino WWII veterans to immigrate and naturalize to the United States. When he arrived in the United States, Mr. Constantino applied for veteran benefits but was told that he needed to be injured during the war to be eligible. Although Mr. Constantino suffers from a range of medical problems, because his disabilities are not war-related, he is deemed ineligible to receive a non-service connected disability pension. For veterans like Mr. Constantino, passage of the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 would mean that he could finally be considered for and receive a disability pension for his non-service connected disabilities as are American veterans with whom he served in the U.S. military. Such a pension would no doubt make a world of difference for Mr. Constantino and his wife who live on an extremely limited income as they try to make ends meet on a daily basis. I also ask you to consider that unlike most legislation, the cost of implementing the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 will only decline significantly over time. This simple fact is the result of the advanced age of the Filipino veteran population who pass away at a rate of 10 to 15 per day.

Almost exactly 61 years ago to this day and shortly after the conclusion of WWII, Congress passed the Rescission Act which provided that the heroic military service of Filipino veterans who served in the U.S. Armed Forces did not constitute “active service” needed to qualify for veteran benefits. For over 60 years, Filipino WWII veterans have fought for the equal benefits they earned in the battlefield as members of the U.S. military. With their advanced age and death rate of 10 to 15 per day, time is of the essence for the aging Filipino WWII veterans.

In February 1946, Congress had a choice to make as do you today. Today, you have the opportunity to correct a grave injustice against veterans who sacrificed life and limb as members of the U.S. Armed Forces during WWII. These veterans spilled their blood and sacrificed their lives in the most harrowing battles of WWII. Congress should pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 to reverse a long-standing injustice against Filipino WWII veterans by amending Title 38 of the U.S. Code, to deem certain service in the organized military forces of the Commonwealth of the Philippines and the Philippine Scouts to have been active service for the purposes of conferring veteran benefits. Please don’t turn your back on these heroic veterans who selflessly gave the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we all enjoy today.

[The attached article by Vanessa B.M. Vergara, “Broken Promises and Aging Patriots: An Assessment of U.S. Veteran Benefits Policy for Filipino World War II Veterans,” *Asian American Policy Review*, VII (1997): 163–182, is being retained in the Committee files.]

**Statement of Teresita Bautista, Member,
Filipino Civil Rights Advocates, Oakland, California**

Honorable Bob Filner, Chairman of the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and distinguished Members of the VA Committee:

I am Teresita Bautista, a member of Filipino Civil Rights Advocates, and a resident of Oakland, California and the San Francisco Bay Area where the Filipino population is 400,000 strong. FilCRA is a member of the National Network for Veterans Equity (NNVE), and NNVE is a member of the National Alliance Filipino Veterans Equity. Our purpose is to finally reverse the injustice of the Rescission Act of 1946.

I am writing to urge your support for H.R. 760, the Filipino WWII Veterans Equity Act of 2007.

I am the daughter of a World War II veteran, Eutiquio Guillermo Bautista. His co-workers called him Tex. He passed during the holidays of 1984, between Christmas and New Year, just after his 75th birthday. He was one of the lucky ones to

return to the U.S. in 1945 after having fought in the Philippines under U.S. command. By then he had met and married his wife, Florentina Cataag. Soon after in August 1946, I was born in his hometown of Aringay, La Union.

My father and scores of others belonged to the First Filipino Infantry of the U.S. Army and fought unconditionally under the American flag in the Philippines to free all from Japanese tyranny and occupation. He, along with countless other unsung heroes, defended and fought tirelessly for democracy in the U.S. and in the world.

After the end of the war, my mother and I traveled on the USS David Schenk, now dry-docked in the bay near Martinez, CA, to join him eventually in Oakland Chinatown, CA. Since the 1950s, my family has been active in the Rizal Post 598 and Auxiliary.

My father asked to be buried in his U.S. Army uniform, a great testament to the way he felt toward the U.S. Because he was already living in the U.S. when he was recruited into the army, he was afforded U.S. citizenship, as were my mother and I, for his valor and commitment to defending the U.S. in the Pacific Rim.

His contributions are no different from those few thousand Filipino WWII veterans, who remain without U.S. military recognition or full benefits, due to the Rescission Act of 1946.

I appeal to the VA Committee to grant these brave men and women their rightful place alongside the U.S. veterans they fought with. They gave their all to live in a free world.

I urgently request you pass H.R. 760.

**Statement of Jenny L. Batongmalaque, M.D., Executive Director,
Filipino Veterans Foundation**

I am Dr. Jenny Batongmalaque, a practicing geriatrician and the Executive Director of the Filipino Veterans Foundation, a charitable, 501(c)3 organization. I am respectfully submitting my testimony on the current status of the Filipino American WWII veterans residing in the Los Angeles County. The facts and figures have been taken from a 10-year longitudinal study following 300 Filipino WWII veterans in the cohort study group residing in the Los Angeles County within the span of 10 years from 1996 to 2006. The report has been published in the Weekend Balita in December 2006.

The instruments used in the survey were the standard questionnaire forms used in conducting a comprehensive geriatric assessment used by the GRECC program of the VAMC-UCLA Consortium which covers five domains:

1. physical status
2. mental status
3. psycho-social status
4. support system and environmental check
5. the value system.

The second instrument used was the Quality of Life Assessment.
The conclusions to these studies are as follows:

- Today, less than 5 percent are currently in the cohort study group. A third have been known to have died and two-thirds have returned to the Philippines.
- **Profile of the Filipino WWII veteran residing in Los Angeles County:** They come from all parts of the Philippines and speak different dialects and sub-languages. A third of them were members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army, and inducted into the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE). They are the fastest disappearing group of cohorts in the study. The largest group are recognized regular Guerrillas, and less than a third belong to the New Philippine Scouts inducted post-war and deployed to Okinawa, Guam or Saipan. They are the younger age group.
- The average is 83 years. 40% reside alone in the United States, due to widowhood or their spouse has remained in the Philippines. 40% have their spouses here in the U.S., and 20% have live-in companions or care-providers.
- Their average Supplemental Security Income is \$700 monthly.
- They have multiple health problems. They take an average of 5 medications, had been brought to the ER by paramedics at least once, because of dizziness or falls, heart attacks or strokes. They have a home health nurse visiting them weekly upon discharge from the hospital.
- Inability in applying for disability veterans benefits claims because of the current existing public law that negates their service, and their conditions today

are largely due to effects of their advanced age rather than service-connected disabilities.

- Access to Healthcare referrals and resources. Their Medicare-Medicaid health insurance provides them better access to hospitals and neighborhood physicians. But they prefer to be serviced by the VA to add merit to their claims. However, having non-service connected disabilities they have low or no priority at all.
- Lack of access to affordable housing placements. The rising rents in the Los Angeles County have forced them to regroup and stay temporarily in the livingrooms of friends. Their homelessness is not apparent in skid row but their frequent change of addresses and no telephone contact alerts the FVF of their housing problems. The list for seeking an affordable, assisted living facility is getting longer by the day.
- Concerns of living alone in the U.S. and meeting end-of-life issues.
- Petitioning for their children to provide care and safety for them while in America. Because of language and culture, they would rather be cared for by those whom they can articulate their tangible and intangible needs. "If I only can afford to pay for my health care in the Philippines, I would rather go home now."

The Filipino Veterans Foundation, an advocacy, 501(c)3 charitable organization has delivered the following without public assistance so far:

- Screening an average of 20 claims a week being reviewed by our volunteer Advocates, Facilitators and Liaisons with the Veterans Service Officers at the County and State Dept of VA with some success (25%). The rest are pending claims (75%) due to the current public law.
- Organized the Veterans Center Association, a membership organization of more than 300 members affiliated to the FVF as direct beneficiaries for services as needed.
- Arranged for an average of 10,000 food bank distributions a year.
- Facilitated the establishment of the first Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Support and Therapy group in Los Angeles County, conducted by the Medical and Mental Health providers of the VA at the FVF venue.
- Senior assessments of health database collected over 10 years is extensive and detailed. Chronic conditions are as follows rated from most frequent:

1. Arthritis	7. Diabetes
2. Hearing Impairment	8. Prostate Disease
3. Cataracts	9. Cancer
4. Heart Disease	10. Alzheimer's Disease, early onset
5. Hypertension	11. Ulcers and GERD
6. Pulmonary Disease	12. Miscellaneous

- Establishing a network of veterans service organizations and medical service organizations.
- Promoting the preservation of Historical and Cultural Values where the Filipino soldier fought side by side with the American soldier:

Four major events in the history of WWII are observed annually:

- Dec. 8, 1941: Outbreak of WWII in the Philippines
- April 9, 1942: Day of Valor, the Fall of Bataan
- July 26, 1941: The Establishment of the United States Armed Forces in the Far East
- October 20, 1944: Leyte Landing and the Liberation of the Philippines
- Memorials for the death of an Unknown Soldier and a veteran residing alone in the U.S., and known only to God, has been observed by FVF and VCA with little funds and fanfare, quietly obtaining an American burial flag for the family as a token of their lifelong struggle, and giving them the final salute in America.
- Gathering all widows, and sons and daughters of the Filipino WWII veterans to keep the flame for liberty and justice going, so that future generations will long remember the struggles of the Filipino-American WWII veteran in his old age, residing in America.

GOALS OF THE FILIPINO VETERANS FOUNDATION FOR 2007 AND THEREAFTER

1. Legislative Action

- A push for full equity before the last Filipino WWII veteran dies in our midst.

- To include the contribution of the Filipino WWII soldier in the annals of American history in public school books so that no child is left ignorant of it.

2. Safe Haven

- Building the **BAYANI Center**, a Heroes Center, a holistic assisted living facility, in the City of Los Angeles, where the predominant number of surviving Filipino-American WWII veterans reside. A Heroes Hall with historical artifacts and memorabilia will add to the attraction of the younger generation to interact with the surviving heroes. This venue is open to all disadvantaged elderly individuals who have been exposed to an armed global conflict in their early life without preference to race, nationality, belief, culture, language or gender.

3. Raise Capital Funds

- Seek for Public and Private Support to continue the mission of the Filipino Veterans Foundation to improve the quality of life of disadvantaged seniors and veterans, regardless of race, nationality, belief, culture, language or gender.
- In their level of understanding in language and culture.
- While attending to the needs.

4. Network with the Veterans Memorial Hospital

- Where we can secure the continuity of care in the Philippines for those who have opted to return to their homeland.

Statement of Hon. Daniel K. Inouye a U.S. Senator from the State of Hawaii

Thank you for your invitation to come before your Committee and to speak in strong support for a legislative measure that you, Mr. Chairman, and I have introduced for the last several Congresses. I deeply regret that my schedule does not allow me to be physically present at your hearing. However, I wish to commend you and Members of the Committee for holding this hearing on the Filipino Veterans Equity Bill. It is my sincere hope that we will be successful in the passage of the Equity Bill during the 110th Congress.

Many of you are aware of my continued advocacy on the importance in addressing the plight of the Filipino World War II veterans. As an American, I believe the treatment of Filipino World War II veterans is bleak and shameful. The Philippines became a United States possession in 1898, when it was ceded by Spain, following the Spanish-American War. In 1934, the Congress enacted the Philippine Independence Act, Public Law 73–127, which provided a 10-year timeframe for the independence of the Philippines. Between 1934 and final independence in 1946, the United States retained certain powers over the Philippines, including the right to call military forces organized by the newly formed Commonwealth government into the service of the United States Armed Forces.

The Commonwealth Army of the Philippines was called to serve with the United States Armed Forces in the Far East during World War II under President Roosevelt's July 26, 1941 military order. The Filipinos who served were entitled to full veterans' benefits by reason of their active service with our armed forces. Hundreds were wounded in battle and many hundreds more died in battle. Shortly after Japan's surrender, the Congress enacted the Armed Forces Voluntary Recruitment Act of 1945 for the purpose of sending Filipino troops to occupy enemy lands, and to oversee military installations at various overseas locations. These troops were authorized to receive pay and allowances for services performed throughout the Western Pacific. Although hostilities had ceased, wartime service of these troops continued as a matter of law until the end of 1946.

Despite all of their sacrifices, on February 18, 1946, the Congress passed the Rescission Act of 1946, now codified as Section 107 of Title 38 of the United States Code. The 1946 Act deemed that the service performed by these Filipino veterans would not be recognized as "active service" for the purpose of any U.S. law conferring "rights, privileges, or benefits." Accordingly, Section 107 denied Filipino veterans access to health care, particularly for non-service-connected disabilities, and pension benefits. Section 107 also limited service-connected disability and death compensation for Filipino veterans to 50 percent of what their American counterparts receive.

On May 27, 1946, the Congress enacted the Second Supplemental Surplus Appropriations Rescission Act, which duplicated the language that had eliminated Filipino

veterans' benefits under the First Rescission Act. Thus, Filipino veterans who fought in the service of the United States during World War II have been precluded from receiving most of the veterans' benefits that had been available to them before 1946, and that are available to all other veterans of our armed forces regardless of race, national origin, or citizenship status.

The Filipino Veterans' Equity Act, which I introduced in the U.S. Senate on January 4, 2007, would restore the benefits due to these veterans by granting full recognition of service for the sacrifices they made during World War II. These benefits include veterans' health care, service-connected disability compensation, non-service connected disability compensation, dependent indemnity compensation, death pension, and full burial benefits.

Throughout the years, I have sponsored several measures to rectify the lack of appreciation America has shown to these gallant men and women who stood in harm's way with our American soldiers and fought the common enemy during World War II. It is time that we as a Nation recognize our longstanding history and friendship with the Philippines. Of the 120,000 that served in the Commonwealth Army during World War II, there are approximately 60,000 Filipino veterans currently residing in the United States and the Philippines. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Filipino veteran population is expected to decrease to approximately 20,000 or roughly one-third of the current population by 2010.

Heroes should never be forgotten or ignored; let us not turn our backs on those who sacrificed so much. Let us instead work to repay all of these brave men for their sacrifices by providing them the veterans' benefits they deserve.

**Statement of Hon. Darrell Issa
a Representative in Congress from the State of California**

Thank you for holding this hearing here today on an issue that is dear to both of us. I know that you have put a lot of effort over the years into advocating for the Filipino veterans to achieve full equity. I have appreciated working with you as the fellow cochair of the U.S.-Philippines Friendship Caucus to move this effort forward in the House.

Today, I am here to speak in support of H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, which the Chairman and I have sponsored over the last two Congresses. It is unfortunate that, 62 years after World War II, we are still holding hearings, debating whether we should give these brave men the rights and benefits that were promised by our government.

The Filipino military was conscripted to fight under General Douglass MacArthur after the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor. These Filipino soldiers fought, and in many instances gave their lives, side by side with Americans against the might of the Japanese empire. In the Battle of Bataan, these soldiers were cut off from all sources of assistance, yet they stood strong against a ruthless enemy for more than 3 months. These men fought to protect their native land, which was also American soil at that time. In defense of their homeland they displayed a strength of spirit that was not destroyed, despite the fiercest effort from the enemy. In the aftermath of the Battles of Bataan and Corregidor many of these brave soldiers then suffered through the atrocity of the Bataan Death March, which took more than 10,000 Filipino and American soldiers' lives.

The men seeking equity today are of that great generation that turned back the tide of tyranny and oppression that threatened to overwhelm the entire world. They were promised full equity by our government, only to be denied it by Congress with the passage of the Rescission Act of 1946. In 1946, President Harry Truman stated, "I consider it a moral obligation of the U.S. to look after the welfare of the Filipino Army veterans."

By passing the Filipino Veterans Equity Act, the House will go a long way toward finally fulfilling our stated obligation. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that there will only be 20,000 living World War II Filipino Veterans by 2010, and only about 10,000 that this legislation would need to cover. With the number of veterans growing smaller every year, time is truly of the essence.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Chairman on this legislation, and I thank him for having a hearing on it so early in this new session.

**Statement of Hon. Tom Lantos
a Representative in Congress from the State of California**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for convening this important hearing on this long overdue legislation. You have long been the leading proponent of a bill that will bring full and fair benefits to all veterans who fought for our country in World War II. Filipino veterans should be no different than veterans who were born in the United States, if you fought in the defense of freedom over tyranny, you should receive all of the benefits afforded to you.

Mr. Chairman, my constituents are all too aware of the egregious slights accorded to them since the end of WWII and are delighted that you are at the helm of this important committee. I have the privilege of representing one of the largest Filipino-American populations outside of Manila. I cannot count the number of times people have come up to me in Daly City, in Pacifica or San Mateo and told me their story of hardship or their family members' lack of care because of a simple designation that was put into law separating one class of Filipino veteran from another.

The Rescission Acts of 1946 are indeed a black mark on this body and it is time to remedy this historic injustice. For too long, there have only been piecemeal attempts to overcome the Rescission Acts. Two years after the initial legislation denying equality to all veterans, there was an attempt at redemption by constructing and equipping a hospital in Luzon and reimbursing the Republic of the Philippines for care and treatment of all of those who fought. Budget concerns gradually diminished the payments for this hospital.

Mr. Chairman, since you were elected in 1992, you shined the legislative spotlight on the full scope of this injustice. In the 109th Congress we passed a resolution that recognized and honored the Filipino World War II veterans for their defense of democratic ideals and their important contribution to the outcome of World War II. Now this Congress should bestow upon those who were ready to give the ultimate sacrifice the services that all other veterans enjoy. Those brave soldiers who served in the Commonwealth Army of the Philippines or the Recognized Guerrilla Forces should receive the same high quality care that those who served in the 101st Airborne do.

I understand that for every benefit given there is a cost but their brave actions helped win a war. I recognize that the Committee faces many challenges to adequately provide for all veterans, but I cannot accept that our country does not have the resources to care for those who cared for us. It is our moral duty to find a way to pay for these necessary services.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate you allowing me to voice my opinion on this singularly important issue and all of the hard work and leadership you have shown. As those of us get older who can remember World War II, it is long past time to provide equal treatment to all veterans and pass the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007.

**Statement of Hon. Juanita Millender-McDonald
a Representative in Congress from the State of California**

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for giving me the privilege of addressing the Committee on Veterans' Affairs today. I am proud to say I have fought for this cause since the 104th Congress and I am delighted that Chairman Filner and the Committee has made it a top priority this year.

We are here because the Committee is examining H.R. 760, legislation to reward World War II Filipino veterans with full benefits rights under the Department of Veterans Affairs. It cannot happen soon enough. There is a declining population of World War II Filipino veterans and each hero deserves the recognition they earned through blood and sacrifice.

More than 100,000 Filipinos **volunteered** when President Roosevelt issued an Executive Order calling members of the Philippine Commonwealth Army into the service of the United States Armed Forces of the Far East in 1941. Under this order, Filipinos were entitled to full veterans' benefits.

The United States Armed Forces of the Far East fought to reclaim control of the entire Western Pacific. Filipinos, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, fought on the front lines of the Battle of Corregidor and at Bataan. They served in Okinawa, on occupied mainland Japan, and in Guam. They were part of what became known as the Bataan Death March, and were held and tortured as prisoners of war. Through these hardships, the men of the Philippine Commonwealth Army remained loyal to the United States during the Japanese occupation

of the Philippines, and the valiant guerrilla war they waged against the Japanese helped delay the Japanese advance across the Pacific.

Despite all of these sacrifices, Congress enacted the Rescission Act of 1946, declaring the service performed by the Philippine Commonwealth Army veterans as not "active service," thus unjustly denying many benefits to which these veterans were rightfully entitled.

For many years, Filipino veterans of World War II, who are now in their seventies and eighties, have sought to correct the injustice caused by the Rescission Act by seeking equal treatment of their valiant military service in our Armed Forces. They stood up to the same aggression that American-born soldiers did, and many Filipinos sacrificed their lives in the war for democracy and liberty.

Heroes should never be forgotten, so let us not turn our backs on the Filipino veterans who sacrificed so much for our country. Let us finally pass H.R. 760 and repay all the brave Filipino veterans for their sacrifices by providing them with benefits that are long overdue.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

Statement of Brig. Gen. Tagumpay A. Nanadiego (Ret.), Orange, California

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, ladies and gentlemen, good morning:

I am a retired general of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, now 88 years old and a USAFFE-Guerrilla Veteran of WWII. I was a 22-year-old enlisted man, a private in the Reserve Force of the Philippine Commonwealth Army when I reported for active duty at Camp Wilhelm, Lucena, Tayabas, Philippines on December 16, 1941, exactly 8 days after the bombing by Japanese planes of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) pursuant to the Military Order of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt of July 26, 1941.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, may I state at this juncture that this is the 3rd time that I have been invited to the hearings on this important subject and I related our sad stories, the experience and torture that we endured in the infamous 65-mile Death March and the hell that was Camp O'Donnell. I related these in detail in my article which I wrote for the Stars and Stripes of April 1996. After the liberation of the Philippines, I returned to military control and I became a member of the Board of Review for the Chief of Staff of the Philippine Army on War Crimes, and let me tell you that Colonel Ito, the Camp Commander at Camp O'Donnell, and General Homma, who ordered the infamous Death March, paid for their lives by their death by hanging by order of the Military Commissions under the doctrine of command responsibility.

In my previous testimonies before like committee, I invited and called attention to the injustice done to the Filipino veterans of World War II by the Rescission Acts of 1946. On December 8, 1941, the enemy bombed Pearl Harbor and the United States military and naval installations in the Philippines, thus bringing the war to the Philippine shores. Americans and Filipinos were then thrown into battle against numerically superior enemy forces and "for 98 historic days with valor unsurpassed in world history they stood their ground against vastly superior forces." Bataan finally fell on April 9, 1942, and together, Americans and Filipinos went through the agony of defeat. They walked together in the "65-mile Bataan March of Death" under the cruel April sun suffering from thirst and hunger as they walked from Mariveles, Bataan to San Fernando, Pampanga.

The war was won, the Philippines was liberated and the Americans enjoyed the thrill and glory of victory. The Filipino veterans, on the other hand, have continued to suffer. The 79th Congress of the United States enacted the Rescission Act of 1946 which declared that the services of the Filipino soldiers who fought side by side with the Americans and suffered the 65-mile Bataan March of Death, "shall not be deemed to have been active military, naval or air service for purposes of any law of the United States conferring rights, privileges or benefits," except those who were killed, died or maimed or separated for service-connected ailments. What the Rescission Act declared in effect was that Filipino veterans who are alive today and in fairly good health at age 74 and above were not with the Americans in the Bataan campaign, did not walk with the Americans from starvation and disease—and are not, therefore, entitled to the privileges and benefits which the Americans and other nationals of foreign countries who fought under the American flag have been enjoying.

Today, I appeal to you and hearken to the words of President William J. Clinton in his proclamation of October 1996, honoring the Filipino veterans of World War II, portions of which read:

"During the dark days of World War II, nearly 100,000 soldiers of the Philippine Commonwealth Army provided a ray of hope in the Pacific as they fought alongside United States and Allied forces for four long years to defend and reclaim the Philippine Islands from Japanese aggression. Thousands more Filipinos joined U.S. Armed Forces immediately after the war and served in occupational duty throughout the Pacific Theater. For their extraordinary sacrifices in defense of democracy and liberty, we owe them our undying gratitude."

"Valiant Filipino soldiers fought, died, and suffered in some of the bloodiest battles of World War II, defending beleaguered Bataan and Corregidor, and thousands of Filipino prisoners of war endured the infamous Bataan Death March and years of captivity. Their many guerrilla actions slowed the Japanese takeover of the Western Pacific region and allowed U.S. forces the time to build and prepare for the allied counterattack on Japan. Filipino troops fought side-by-side with U.S. forces to secure their island nation as the strategic base from which the final effort to defeat was launched."

Thank you!

[The attached article by Tagumpay A. Nanadiego, "Camp O'Donnell: A Four-Month Nightmare in the Philippines." *The Stars and Stripes* 14 April 1996: 10, is being retained in the Committee files.]

**Statement of Lillian Galedo, Co-Chair,
National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity**

My name is Lillian Galedo. I am the Co-chair of the National Alliance for Filipino Veterans Equity (NAFVE) a recently formed national coalition of organizations and individuals who have fought for the past 12 years for the right of Filipino World War II veterans to equal status in the eyes of the U.S. Government. I am also the Executive Director of Filipinos for Affirmative Action, in Oakland, California.

It is the National Alliance's fervent hope that the U.S. Congress will finally correct a 60+-year injustice, and restore to Filipino WWII veterans their rightful claim to U.S. veterans' status. For the past six decades these brave veterans have sought to end the discrimination they have endured and be recognized as equal to all other WWII veterans who fought under U.S. command.

The Filipino community, which is now 2.5 million strong and has a 100+ history here in the U.S., has made this issue a priority since these veterans were finally granted the ability to apply for U.S. citizenship in the early 1990's.

Historically, WWII is remembered as "the good war" against the threat of fascism. As a nation Americans remain ignorant of the Pacific 'theater' of WWII against Japan. In the national 'minds eye' we see American combatants in the Pacific, and blot out the contributions of the thousands of Filipinos and Pacific Islanders who fought and died on this front.

Americans have very little appreciation for the debt we owe the Filipino people. As a colony of the U.S., Filipinos were inducted into the U.S. military by Executive Order. They fought alongside Americans, under the same commander, for the same reasons. The most sustained campaign against Japanese tyranny was fought in the Philippines. The Filipino people's resistance to Japan's invasion and to the subsequent occupation of the Philippines provided the U.S. the 'breathing room' to rebuild American forces after Pearl Harbor and rethink our war strategy. The valiant resistance by Filipinos forced the Japanese to maintain resources in the Philippine occupation, weakening Japanese ability to defend themselves in other parts of the Pacific.

Risking everything so we in the U.S. wouldn't experience the terror of war on our soil, the Filipino military—regular and guerrilla—fought against overwhelming odds to spare Americans the agony of war. Because Filipinos fought the Japanese so courageously in Luzon, Americans did not have to fight the war in Monterey, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

The cost of war for the Filipino people was 300,000 dead, a thoroughly damaged infrastructure, and a devastated economy. For their sacrifices, the U.S. Congress in

1945 legislated that the service of Filipinos did not constitute service in the U.S. military!

Today Filipino WWII veterans are in their late 70's and 80's, and living in poverty; unappreciated for their service to preserving democracy in the U.S. Their sub-standard living conditions are compounded by separation from a supportive family network, poor health, and in some cases depression.

What price freedom?

The Filipino community's struggle to correct this injustice has been met year after year with false-concerns for the financial impact of 'doing the right thing.' How do we place a price tag on our freedom? How in a period of patriotism, and increased military spending, can Americans turn our backs on Filipino soldiers who displayed supreme patriotism? Surely, a government that appreciates the fact that America remained a free country after WWII will find the resources to compensate those who helped make it possible. Given the advanced age of the veterans and the high rate of deaths that is occurring, we are anxious to correct this injustice while there is a significant number of veterans to realize this victory.

We urge the 110th Congress to grant full military status, entitlement to the same benefits that other U.S. veterans receive, and the recognition of the role Filipinos played in preserving American democracy, by passing H.R. 760.

**Statement of Ernesto G. Ramos, Chair,
National Federation of Filipino American Association, Region IV**

I am thankful to be able to provide this testimony—as the proud son of the late Teofilo Ramos, a WWII veteran and Prisoner of War. The following is a recollection from the memoirs of my mom and my uncles—and the soldiers who fought with my dad. Ironically, my dad seldom talked about his ordeal during that war. It may have been because his story was too cruel and too agonizing to be told to us, his children.

My dad was born on December 28, 1903. But on July 28, 1941—as a strapping 37-year head schoolteacher in the province of Pangasinan—my dad pledged allegiance to the flag of the United States of America upon orders of a certain Major Lapham, who called to duty thousands of Filipinos across the central Luzon under the aegis of then-General Douglas MacArthur, who was designated by the U.S. War Department as Commander of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Far East (**USAFFE**).

General MacArthur and Captain Lapham sworn-in my dad and hundreds of his students into the U.S. Armed Forces to implement the Executive Order handed down by then-President Franklin Delano Roosevelt on July 26, 1941 with these words:

"As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, I hereby call and order into the service of the Armed Forces of the United States ... all organized military forces of the Government of the Commonwealth of the Philippines."

That fateful day—July 28, 1941—my dad and about 120 of his 18-year-old students became soldiers of the United States Armed Forces—with all the rights and privileges accruing thereto. He led this band of young soldiers—fighting side by side with their American comrades-in-arms across the hills and dales, rivers and rice fields of Central Luzon—and into Bataan and Corregidor.

Having fought courageously all over Central Luzon, my father was captured—along with two of his bodyguard soldiers—on June 17, 1943, when he furtively visited our family in the barrio of our town. The three were incarcerated under the Japanese Kempeitai (the Japanese torture army)—and subjected to extreme conditions for some nine (9) months—with water torture, floggings and beatings and unimaginable sufferings and deprived of food, except water and soupy rice. The Japanese intelligence officers and Kempeitai interrogators wanted to extricate from my dad the whereabouts and names of American officers (Col. Tucket, Col. King and Major Lapham—among them) and of his Philippine Scouts, who escaped from the Fall of Bataan and Corregidor to continue the fight.

On March 15, 1944—the Japanese Kempeitai brought my dad and his two soldiers on a carabao-driven cart to the town cemetery. At dusk that day, these two soldiers were beheaded in front of my dad—most assuredly, to goad him into confessing the names and whereabouts of American officers and members of his Philippines Scouts contingent. Though emaciated and reduced to a mere 82-pound weakling, my dad made his peace with God, prepared to meet his imminent death and yet determined that he was not going to give in and divulge anything about his comrades-in-arms. Then—as if by an act of Divine Intervention—severe thunder and lightning ensued

followed by torrential rains—and the Kempetai were forced to bring my dad back to his prison-dungeon, leaving the severed heads and mutilated bodies of his two soldiers strewn on the cemetery grounds.

Unable to draw from my dad the confession they thought they'd get—and troubled by his seeming uselessness, the Japanese doctor and his assistants diagnosed my dad's health that he was going to die anyway. They called my mom to pick him up from his prison—either to prepare him for his eventual death or perhaps nurse him back to health, which was then unlikely. My mom and my uncles gingerly picked my dad from prison—and because our hamlet was swarming with many Japanese soldiers and their collaborators, they went straight for the hills under cover of darkness, dodging everything through thickets of tall grass across farmlands for two nights. They settled some 60 miles west of our town in a nondescript wooded hamlet. Shortly thereafter all of his children were fetched by my uncles, following the same hideous routes. There in those hills we lived to await war's end—with the kindness of folks in that hamlet.

Amidst those harrowing times, my dad was raring to join his soldiers and his will-power was strong enough. Then one night a platoon of Philippine scouts/guerrillas picked him up and brought him to the camp of Major Lapham to make his report on the strength of the Japanese Army in Pangasinan—particularly in the towns of Binalonan, Pozzurubio and Asingan where remnants of General Tojo's Japanese Elite Brigade remained—not too far from the prison camp in a nearby Nueva Ecija town where some 500 American soldiers from Bataan and Corregidor were imprisoned, and were being readied for transfer to the factories in Japan.

He was nursed back to health—and continued to fight and lead his soldiers in countless skirmishes against the vastly armed Japanese soldiers. He served under the command of Major Lapham for many days and many months then—until my dad was ordered to pull together a special contingent of American and Filipino soldiers to pave the way for the eventual landing of General MacArthur on Pangasinan's Lingayen Gulf on January 9, 1945.

While doing his duty as a soldier under the American flag, my dad remained ever optimistic. He also believed in the genuine character of America as a nation, firm in his faith that President Roosevelt would make good his promise to recognize the service of my dad and thousands of other Filipino soldiers, who like him served willingly and courageously—above and beyond the call of duty.

My dad never lost faith in America. In fact, he came to America many times at a time when his three children immigrated to America as professionals. And in 1982 he was very proud indeed to be sworn in as a U.S. citizen, along with my mom, by none other than then-U.S. Senior District Court Judge Abraham Lincoln Marovitz at Chicago's Dirksen Federal Building. Judge Marovitz was a fellow soldier, who held the rank of a U.S. Army corporal, and accompanied General MacArthur when he landed on Lingayen Gulf.

Needless to say, the reunion of these two soldiers in Judge Marovitz's chambers was a sight to behold! And my mom and we their children couldn't have been any prouder when they embraced each other—grateful that together they came out of that horrible war alive—with their humanity intact and a greater appreciation that their friendship was again revisited.

Even while he was dying on January 20, 1993, my dad was hopeful that America will do right by his fellow comrades-in-arms with these words: "**I just hope that before I die, the injustice suffered by my fellow soldiers will be corrected.**" But he died January 25, 1993—a broken man, deeply saddened because America reneged on its promise to him and thousands of his fellow soldiers—with the grim specter of the 1946 Rescission Act still hanging over the heads of the remaining WWII veterans fading away at a fast clip of 8 to 10 soldiers a day.

Accordingly, thanks to you, Mr. Chairman—the passage of the WWII Veterans Equity Act evoked by your H.R. 760 and S. 57, its companion bill filed by Senator Inouye in the Senate, will truly hasten the day of redemption that will right the wrong perpetrated against my dad's fellow soldiers—and their comrades who have passed on—when the 79th U.S. Congress passed that infamous Rescission Act of 1946, virtually eliminating benefits for our WWII Filipino veterans, shaming their years of service as if they were all expendable and bereft of the honor and gratitude with which brave soldiers are usually acknowledged and honored.

Leaving no wrong impression upon America and the world about the untold casualty unleashed upon the Philippines for being then a territorial commonwealth of the United States of America, President Roosevelt nobly recognized the loyalty and heroism of Filipino soldiers and their countrymen when he signed on June 15, 1944, the Senate Joint Resolution #93 with the following words:

"We are ever mindful of the heroic role of the Philippines, their people and their soldiers in the present conflict. Theirs is the only substantial population under the American flag to suffer lengthy invasion of the enemy."

Against this backdrop, therefore, there is no reasonable doubt for the current 110th Congress to abrogate its responsibility and lose a historic opportunity to right the wrong perpetrated against our WWII Filipino veterans. These remaining soldiers are in the twilight of their years. In a few short years, they will just be a fading memory.

To me—the proud son of the late Teofilo Ramos, a brave warrior of WWII and a braver POW, and to all the sons and daughters and compatriots of these veterans—we cannot and we will not ignore this grave injustice that America had done to them. We ask of you, therefore, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this august Veterans' Committee, to help us remind and sear America's collective memory once again with the sacrifices of these brave soldiers, who at the prime of their lives put themselves in harm's way so that America's quest for peace and the triumph of American democracy would reign supreme.

With history as our judge—and the quest for simple justice our guide—our WWII Filipino veterans are no less deserving than any group of U.S. veterans, who fought and served and died under the glorious flag of the United States of America.

I urge you—Mr. Chairman—to right this wrong. I pray that, under your leadership, the 110th Congress will finally pass the WWII Filipino Veterans Equity Act.

Thank you—Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. God bless you!

**Statement of Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
a Representative in Congress from the State of Virginia**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Buyer, I am truly pleased that you have taken the initiative to hold hearings on this important issue. As the only Member of Congress of Filipino ancestry, I am honored to come before this Committee to present my views on this ongoing injustice. President John F. Kennedy once said, "A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but also by the men it honors, the men it remembers." H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007, will finally honor the veterans of World War II that have up to this point been forgotten.

Filipino veterans of World War II have for too long been denied the benefits that were promised them by the United States. Based on estimates from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the government of the Philippines, there will be less than 20,000 Filipino veterans of World War II living in the United States and in the Philippines this year. Speedy passage of H.R. 760 is critical because we are losing more and more Filipino veterans of World War II to the advances of age each day.

On July 26, 1941, as it became increasingly likely that the United States would enter World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an order to draft some 120,000 soldiers of the Philippine Commonwealth Army, who at the time were U.S. nationals, into the U.S. Armed Forces. These drafted Filipino soldiers fought on our behalf with the expectation that they would be entitled to the same benefits as any other member of the U.S. Armed Forces. These soldiers showed extreme courage at the battles of Bataan and Corregidor, fighting side-by-side with American soldiers. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman cited that during the War, Philippine Army veterans "fought with gallantry and courage under the most difficult conditions." President Truman declared that it was a "moral obligation of the United States to look after the welfare of the Philippine Army veterans." Unfortunately, President Truman's promise remains unfulfilled. In 1946, Congress withdrew full benefits for Filipino veterans when the Philippines became an independent nation. Now, 60 years later, our Filipino veterans are still waiting to see those promises fulfilled.

We saw some progress in 2003 when we passed the Veterans Benefits Act, which finally extended V.A. medical care to 8,000 Filipino veterans living in the United States and made the New Philippine Scouts living in the U.S. eligible for burial in V.A. national cemeteries. But this was only the first step.

The people and the Federal Government of our great nation are indebted to the nearly 120,000 Filipinos who fought against tyranny in the Pacific in World War II for their extraordinary sacrifices. We are now approaching 62 years since the War in the Pacific ended and the Filipinos who fought under the command of U.S. generals and alongside American soldiers are still waiting to receive their rightfully deserved benefits.

I commend this Committee for holding hearings on this important piece of legislation that has been introduced in the last several Congresses. I would like to personally acknowledge Chairman Filner, Congressman Darrell Issa, the Chairman of the Congressional Asian and Pacific Islanders Caucus Congressman Mike Honda, and all the other cosponsors of H.R. 760 for their diligence—not only in this Congress, but in the previous Congresses—in building support for and educating our colleagues about the importance of this legislation to right this terrible injustice.

I hope that this Committee will soon favorably report on H.R. 760 so that this Congress can finally provide the long awaited benefits that our Filipino veterans rightly deserve. Thank you again for inviting me here this morning to testify before this distinguished Committee.

Statement of Jaymee Faith Sagisi, Student Action for Veterans Equity

Greetings to you Chair Filner and the Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your astounding leadership, Representative Filner, in continuing to move this significant issue forward.

I am here to testify about the one thing that brings us all together today for this momentous, yet long overdue event—that one common thread that binds us all together is service.

As you have heard the remarkable stories of our Filipino WWII veterans, they shared their individual recollections of their service. It was their service that stopped the Japanese imperialist and guaranteed victory in the Philippines, a then-existing territory of the United States. It is their service that still goes unrecognized.

And today, it is your sense of civil service to listen to us constituents and do what is right. I urge you to reflect on the values that brought you to become civil servants and vote your conscience.

In this same spirit of service, I am here on behalf of the students and youth, to testify to the youth's relentless service to this cause of winning equity for our brave elders—both men and women, who took it upon themselves to defend the islands against violent occupation when they were our same age.

As many of you already know, youth and students have played crucial roles in advancing social justice and fighting for civil rights. The voting block from the past election shows a galvanizing younger voting base with greater interests toward politics. As part of this base, the Student Action for Veterans Equity, also known as SAVE, has tried to mobilize youth in high schools, colleges and universities around the issue of full equity.

In 2002, SAVE was established and started as the youth sector of the National Network for Veterans Equity. Later, we became our own independent coalition (a sister coalition to NNVE) to focus solely on raising awareness among youth and students. At our height, we had member colleges from all over the nation, including but not limited to colleges in New York, Texas, Illinois, Washington, Hawaii, Virginia, Maryland and California. We have been able to accomplish many things to advance the fight for equity. We established the Brown Ribbon Campaign, a national campaign for veterans' equity, which we launched in 2003. We hosted a West Coast Summit for high school and college students primarily concentrated in institutions all over California, in Nevada and in Washington. We host national vigils and every year since our establishment, we host a week of action, commemorating the military order of President Roosevelt dated July 26, 1941, in which over 200,000 Filipino WWII soldiers were inducted under U.S. forces.

Just this past 109th Congress, we launched a national letter-writing campaign, where hundreds of letters were sent daily to the chairs of both the house Veterans' Affairs Committee and Senate Affairs Committee. Each letter highlighted the story and service of a Filipino WWII veteran, many of whom have already passed but we still keep alive through this fight for justice. And in building off of these efforts, today I am submitting to you another hundred letters from students around this nation, in support of cause.

I want to leave you with some final thoughts. The fight for full veterans' equity was the first issue that brought me to work in my community, almost a decade ago. It is a close issue to me since my lolo Celedonia R. Cadiz was a Filipino guerrilla, who became MIA and later was declared dead, during World War II. I learned through this campaign that there are two groups of people in this world: those who are born with rights and those who have to fight for their rights. I stand before you as a member of a community that had to fight for every right we have. And with

the issue; we stand in the same position. We as the members of SAVE, understand this fight, and stand ready. We will not waiver for anything less than equity. We will continue this fight for their rights and only you can redeem their courageous service. Support the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 and recognize their service once and for all.

Statement of Gil P. Zulueta, Virginia Beach, Virginia

Congressman Bob Filner and Members of the House Veterans' Committee, my name is Virgilio Zulueta. My friends call me Gil. I am a resident of Virginia Beach, Virginia and I am a citizen of the United States.

In a nutshell, the ultimate goals are to obtain monetary compensation and secure preferential treatment for immigration to this country for the Filipino veterans of World War II. Those are the main reasons why my friends and I want to amend the so called Rescission Act of 1946. The simple truth, however, is that even though my father was one of those veterans, none of these reasons apply to him, to mother, to me or to any of my siblings.

So what is in it for me? It will help me explain if you allow me to tell a little more about myself, my family and where I came from.

I was born during World War II in the little town of Morong in the province of Bataan, the Philippines. For those who are familiar with the events and places related to the said war, the place is where the U.S. Armed Forces held its last stand against the Japanese Imperial Army. The Fall of Bataan is commemorated every year on April 9. One will find these facts in history books. Of course, not about my being born—there are way too many much more significant “world events” to write about than that.

Also in the history books are the gallantry and many sacrifices of both the American and Filipino soldiers. While still very young and not yet able to read, I was fortunate to know some of the war stories without the aid of the history books. Countless times, I listened to the stories as they were told so vividly and firsthand by the former soldiers and by the members of the guerrilla forces. “Story telling” was just about the pastime among the populace in the small town where I grew up. People will group together in no particular place and share stories. Because the war had just recently ended at the time, the grown-ups frequently talked about their war experiences or those of their friends and relatives. There was no movie house, no bowling alley or any form of recreation—“story telling” is the only thing.

One such story is about four brothers who were in a particular gathering. Two of the brothers were among about a dozen or so men that were being beaten by Japanese soldiers near the town plaza. The men have their hands tied behind their back and are unable to defend themselves from the blows. The choice of weapon was branches of guava plant with the diameter about the size of a man's wrist. Guava wood is known for being sturdy and not easy to break. As the two brothers continue to receive the blows, two of their younger brothers were among the onlookers who helplessly watch the beatings. They were helplessly watching because they were prevented to cross a perimeter of Japanese soldiers with bayonets mounted on their rifles.

The pain must have been so unbearable not only for the two brothers receiving the actual blows but also for the two brothers who were witnessing the beatings. They suffered such brutality because they were members of an organized guerrilla force and were known to have given comfort to American soldiers who were able to evade capture by the enemies. By the way, the four brothers were my father and three of his siblings.

The trauma suffered from the brutal beatings plus the sufferings from the physical and emotional stress of the war must have taken their toll. Their immune systems deteriorated to the point that they became sickly. Both of them died shortly after the war. They were in their 30s when they died of disease. Had they been able to avail themselves with better healthcare maybe they could have lived longer. My two uncles and thousands of men like them should have been provided with healthcare by the U.S. Government for their services in the U.S. Armed Forces. This was not to be the case because of the so-called Rescission Act of 1946.

To complete the story of the four brothers, one of them, my father, died at age 45. He enjoyed at least for a short period the benefits of his wartime services. The benefits were from the Philippine government and not from the United States. Again, this is so because of the Rescission Act of 1946. The fourth brother survived the Bataan Death March. He took advantage of the GI Bill given to members of the USAFFE and went back to school after the war. He has since immigrated to the

United States together with his family. He is still alive and proudly drives his car with a POW license plate issued by the State of Nevada. He is the only living sibling of my father; his name is Nestro Zulueta.

Two years ago, I was home in the Philippines during the commemoration of the Fall of Bataan in Mt. Samat. I met some of my Uncle Nestro's contemporaries. They are old now—very old. Among their ranks, a few of them die each day. For most of them, they have yet to receive a single cent for their services performed more than half a century ago in the United States Armed Forces.

Gentlemen and gentle ladies of the Committee, I submit to you that this is wrong. You have the power to undo a great injustice. You have the power to amend the Rescission Act of 1946. I am asking you to do the right thing. Thank you all very much for listening.

POST-HEARING QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES FOR THE RECORD

**Questions from Hon. Bob Filner, Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
to Hon. R. James Nicholson, Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20515
February 21, 2007

Honorable R. James Nicholson
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In reference to our full Committee hearing on Full Equity for Filipino veterans on February 15, 2007, I would appreciate it if you could answer the enclosed hearing questions by the close of business on March 28, 2007.

In an effort to reduce printing costs, the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, in co-operation with the Joint Committee on Printing, is implementing some formatting changes for materials for all full Committee and Subcommittee hearings. Therefore, it would be appreciated if you could provide your answers consecutively on letter size paper, single-spaced. In addition, please restate the question in its entirety before the answer.

Sincerely,

BOB FILNER
Chairman

Question 1: Can you tell me how many World War II era Filipino veterans are now presently living in both the United States and in the Philippines? Do you have those numbers by category, i.e., New Scouts, Old Scouts, Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrillas?

Response: The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not have any statistics on the total number of World War II-era Filipino veterans living in both the United States and in the Philippines. VA only has statistics on those Filipino veterans and claimants who are currently receiving VA compensation or dependency and indemnity compensation (DIC). The following table shows the breakdown of Filipino veterans and claimants who are currently receiving VA benefit payments.

	Live in the Philippines	Live in the United States	Live in Other Countries
Filipino Veterans Receiving Disability Payments	2,726	683	32
Filipino Claimants Receiv- ing DIC	4,649	435	35
Total	7,375	1,118	67

Question 2: Does the VA currently provide funds to the Veterans Medical Memorial Center in the Philippines? If yes, under what authority? Has that authority been reauthorized by Congress?

Response: VA provides grants of equipment, not money, and does this under the authority of 38 U.S.C. section 1731. This authority is not time-limited and thus does not need to be reauthorized by Congress.

Question 3: Are the children of the New Scouts, Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrillas eligible for education benefits? If yes, at what rate?

Response: Children of veterans of the New Philippine Scouts, Commonwealth Army, and recognized guerrilla forces are eligible for Chapter 35 Dependents' Educational Assistance benefits at the rate of \$0.50 for each dollar. To be eligible for Dependents' Educational Assistance benefits, the individual must be a child of a

service-member who died on active duty or a child of a veteran who is permanently and totally disabled or who died from any cause while such service-connected disability was in existence. Generally, children may use the benefit while they are between the ages of 18 and 26.

Question 4: Are Old Scouts, New Scouts, Commonwealth Army, and Recognized Guerrillas regardless of citizenship eligible for burial flags?

Response: Veterans of the Regular Philippine Scouts, New Philippine Scouts, Commonwealth Army, or recognized guerrilla forces who are United States citizens or lawfully residing in the United States are eligible to receive a burial flag.

Question 5: Is the Manila outpatient clinic operating at full capacity? Can it handle more patients?

Response: The Manila clinic is operating at full capacity—the budget is committed and primary care panels are full. The clinic is able to handle the current demand. Increasing patient workload would require an increase in current clinical personnel and associated resources (e.g., administrative support and space). The existing clinic space would allow for no more than a 20-percent increase in patient workload.

Question 6: Are New Scouts, Commonwealth Army and Recognized Guerrillas eligible for the same medical care in the U.S. as other veterans of the U.S. Armed Services?

Response: Title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, § 17.39 provides that “Any Filipino Commonwealth Army veteran, including one who was recognized by authority of the U.S. Army as belonging to organized Filipino guerrilla forces, or any New Philippine Scout is eligible for hospital care, nursing home care, and outpatient medical services within the United States in the same manner and subject to the same terms and conditions as apply to U.S. veterans, if such veteran or scout resides in the United States and is a citizen or lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence.”

Question 7: What steps has the VA taken, if any, against fraud in the VA regional office in Manila? What is the rate of fraud, if any, in the VA regional office in Manila?

Response: The Manila Regional Office (RO) uses a variety of anti-fraud measures to ensure that VA benefits are paid to the rightful beneficiary. The Manila RO employs ten full-time field investigators who verify the identity of the VA beneficiary. In addition, the Manila RO uses an identification verification system and the Office of Inspector General's Forensic Services. VA is unable to provide the rate of fraud.

Question 8: What is the projected death rate of Filipino World War II era veterans receiving VA benefits?

Response: VA does not have a projected death rate for Filipino World War II veterans.

Question 9: Pursuant to 38 U.S.C. § 109(a), the VA may furnish discharged members of allied forces, upon request of the allied governments, various benefits, based on reciprocity. Are there any veterans from allied countries still receiving benefits based on the aforementioned statute? If yes, what type of benefits do they receive?

Response: VA may furnish medical, surgical, dental treatment, hospital care, transportation and traveling expenses, prosthetic appliances, education, training, or similar benefits to veterans of any nation allied or associated with the United States in World War I (except any nation that was an enemy of the U.S. during World War II) or World War II under agreements requiring reimbursement. Currently, VA provides such services to veterans authorized by the United Kingdom and Canada. This statute also authorizes care to World War I and World War II era Polish and Czechoslovakian veterans who have been citizens of the United States for at least 10 years. These veterans are eligible for VA health care benefits in the same manner as veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States. VBA is not currently providing benefits to veterans of allied governments.

**Questions from Hon. Steve Buyer, Ranking Republican Member,
Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to Hon. R. James Nicholson, Secretary,
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**

Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC
May 1, 2007

Honorable R. James Nicholson
Secretary
Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Mr. Secretary:

In reference to our Committee hearing of February 15, 2007, on Veterans Benefits for Filipino Veterans, I am attaching with this letter some additional questions to be included in the hearing record. I would appreciate a response to the enclosed questions for the record by close of business Wednesday, May 30, 2007.

It would be appreciated if you could provide your answers consecutively on letter size paper, single spaced. Please restate the question in its entirety before providing the answer.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Steve Buyer
Ranking Republican Member

Question 1: What do you believe the implementation and mandatory costs for 1 year and over 10 years for H.R. 760, the Filipino Veterans Equity Act of 2007 would be?

Response: The total compensation and pension mandatory costs are estimated to be \$441.2 million during the first year and nearly \$3.7 billion over 10 years. The costs associated with additional full time employees (FTE) are estimated to be \$8.8 million the first year and \$27 million over 10 years.

Question 2: Is it your understanding that if H.R. 760 was made into law it would authorize members of the new scouts, Commonwealth Army, and Recognized Guerrillas to receive compensation at the full rates as specified in title 38?

Response: Yes, this legislation would authorize members of the new scouts, Commonwealth Army, and recognized guerrillas to receive compensation at the full rates as specified in title 38. The law as proposed would have five major ramifications:

- Payment of the full rate of compensation for veterans residing outside of the United States
- Payment of the full rate of dependency and indemnity compensation (Ole) for surviving spouses residing outside of the United States
- Entitlement to veterans pension benefits
- Entitlement to death pension for surviving spouses
- Entitlement to the burial benefit and plot allowance for veterans who do not reside in the United States
- Entitlement to health care

Question 3: What reductions in other mandatory funding programs within the VA would need to be made to offset the mandatory funding that is authorized by H.R. 760?

Response: The Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) does not recommend reducing other mandatory programs to offset the cost of H.R. 760.

Question 4: What is VA's current and proposed FY2008 spending for Filipino old scouts, new scouts, members of the Commonwealth Army, and recognized guerrillas?

Response: As of February 2007, there were 3,441 Filipino veterans receiving compensation. This number excludes old scouts who qualify for the full range of benefits and services as veterans of the United States Armed Forces. During the month of February 2007, Filipino new scouts, members of the Commonwealth Army, and recognized guerrillas received total monthly payments of \$2,791,532. We do not have budgetary projections for these groups of Filipino disability compensation recipients.

Question 5: What steps will be taken to prevent potential fraud should pension benefits be granted to Philippine veterans?

Response: The Manila Regional Office (RO) uses a variety of anti-fraud measures to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits are paid to the rightful beneficiary. The Manila RO employs 10 full-time field investigators who verify the identity of the VA beneficiary. In addition, the Manila RO uses an identification verification system and the Office of Inspector General's forensic services.

However, a major component of our administration of the VA pension programs involves income verification and other computer matching programs with agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Administration. Through these matching programs, we are able to verify pensioners' reported income and employment status. These programs are also important in identifying and deterring fraud. We would not have access to these types of external data sources in the Philippines, making administration of the pension programs in the Philippines much more difficult and increasing the potential for fraud.

**Questions from Hon. Steve Buyer, Ranking Republican Member,
Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to Carlos D. Sorreta, Charge d'Affaires,
Embassy of the Philippines, and Response from His Excellency Willy C.
Gaa,
Ambassador, Embassy of the Philippines**

Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Washington, DC 20515
May 1, 2007

Mr. Carlos D. Sorreta
Charge d'Affaires ad interim of the Philippines
Embassy of the Philippines
1600 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. Charge d'Affaires,

Thank you for testifying before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs at the Committee's hearing on Veterans Benefits for Filipino Veterans, held on February 15, 2007.

I am attaching with this letter some additional questions to be included in the hearing record. I would appreciate your response to the enclosed additional questions for the record by close of business Wednesday, May 30, 2007.

It would be appreciated if you could provide your answers consecutively on letter size paper, single spaced. Please restate the question in its entirety before providing the answer.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Steve Buyer
Ranking Republican Member

Embassy of the Philippines
Washington, DC 20036
29 May 2007

The Honorable Steve Buyer
Congressman
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515 (202-225-2267)

Dear Congressman Buyer,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated 1 May 2007 requesting Mr. Carlos Sorreta, who was the Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy when he testified before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs at the Committee's hearing for Filipino Veterans on 15 February 2007, to reply to additional questions, to be included in the hearing record.

I am pleased to submit our official reply (enclosed) to the questions attached to your letter.

I deeply appreciate the opportunity to answer these questions and hope that we were able to address your concerns.

I would also like to assure you that we remain ready to address, personally or through our respective staff, any other concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Willy C. Gaa
Ambassador

Question 1. According to your own census bureau, the average per capita income is around \$1400. How is it equitable to Americans and non-veteran Filipinos that these veterans will be making seven and a half times this number under H.R. 760?

Answer: We appreciate the concerns that have been expressed over the issue of the difference in the standards of living between the United States and the Philippines in the context of the implementation of H.R. 760.

We believe that it is equitable to provide a fair non-service connected pension to poor Filipino WWII veterans in their eighties and nineties who served honorably in the U.S. Army.

However, these concerns could be addressed by adjusting the pension to be given to veterans in the Philippines to an amount that would allow them to live in dignity and that would cover their out-of-pocket medical expenses in their few remaining years.

We also believe that the base amount should not be the per capita income of Filipinos but the median family income. This reflects more accurately the social and economic realities in the Philippines, where segments of the population are not of employment age while other segments are not employed at all. The equitable standard should be median Filipino household income, which is \$3800.

Question 2: Are you concerned that if this bill goes through that it will make a new class of veterans that may cause a sense of unfairness by other groups of veterans in your country?

Answer: We believe that if this bill goes through, there would be no issue of creating a new class of veterans or a sense of unfairness.

Providing U.S. veterans pension benefits to Filipinos in the Philippines is not new. Currently, the U.S. Veterans Administration already provides war-related compensation and pension benefits to thousands of Filipino WWII "Old Scouts."

According to the VA Regional Director in Manila, Jon Skelly, he disburses about \$14M monthly to these veterans.

Question 3: How would the tax code in the Philippines apply to benefits paid by the U.S. Government? Would this money be tax free and if not please provide us the actual take-home pay for a Filipino veteran for both H.R. 760 and the \$200 per month proposal?

Answer: Pension benefits in any form are not taxed under Philippine law. The benefits currently being given by the U.S. Veterans Administration to Filipino veterans in the Philippines are not taxed. Benefits to be given under H.R. 760 will not be taxed.

Question 4: Would your government support a proposal of \$200 a month for each veteran paid by the U.S. Government plus the \$100 per month paid by your government?

Answer: For the Philippine Government, while the amount is a matter of importance, the primary issue is that of correcting a 60-year-old grave injustice through the passage of H.R. 760. In terms of the amount, we are for a fair and equitable pension. We are aware that a number of veterans themselves are willing to accept this amount. We are certainly open to discussion on the issue of amount, based on our desire for a fair and reasonable amount, but also keenly aware of the duty of the U.S. Congress to act with fiscal responsibility.

Question 5: What steps would your government immediately take to show to the U.S. Government that the law banning double payment by your government and the U.S. will be rescinded?

Answer: We are glad to inform that President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, in her letter to President Bush on 5 April 2007, gave her assurance that the \$100 old-age

pension that the Filipino WWII veterans are currently receiving will continue even after the passage of the H.R. 760.

Question 6: Instances of past fraud in payments to Filipino veterans residing in the Philippines are well documented. What steps will the government of the Philippines and VA take to prevent a recurrence of such fraud should pension benefits be granted to Philippine veterans?

Answer: In terms of the basic list of veterans, only those listed by the St. Louis, Missouri Army Personnel Record Center and the loyalty board records will be included. Those not listed will be excluded. For both the Philippine and the U.S. Governments, strict and rigorous methods will be applied to prevent fraud. There will be stringent requirements for proof of identity, to prevent identity theft. There will be regular checks to ensure that the beneficiary is still alive.

